

No 18

5 cents.

WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE STORY **WEEKLY**. EVERY WEEK.

SANDOW, JUNIOR;

OR, THE BOY WHO LOOKED PUNY. *By PROF OLIVER OWENS.*



It was a feat for a giant, or one tired of life! 'As well die now as tomorrow!' vented friendless, heartsick young Sandow. He seized the bridle, stiffened his tense muscles and prayed—for scornful Elsie, not himself!

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SANDOW, JUNIOR

OR,

The Boy Who Looked Puny

By Prof. Oliver Owens

CHAPTER I.

DROPPED OUT OF THE SKIES.

One hot summer afternoon they were swopping "strong man" lies in Bud Spencer's grocery store in Blissville.

"Why, I used to think nothing of pulling back on the traces hard enough to teach a colt to back," bragged John Donnell.

"'Member how I used to wrestle with that black and white bull of our'n?" demanded Jim Havers.

Nobody did remember, but all the men in the crowd nodded.

"See them stairs that lead up to the back storeroom?" demanded Bud, pointing to a short flight of seven steps at the rear of his store. "Any day I can lift a full barrel of flour, tote it up those steps, and——"

"Less see you do it," hinted a red-haired, freckle-faced small boy in the crowd.

"I just eat my dinner," Bud explained, though without looking at the boy.

"Ain't ye eatin' to get strength?" persisted the red-haired one.

"Yep," agreed Bud, looking at the ceiling.

"Huh!" said the tease with red hair. "Then right after dinner ye oughter be stronger!"

"That 'minds me of the load I useter lift," broke in a farmer, hurriedly, to cover up the "break" of the small boy. "I——"

And then followed another strong-man lie.

From the doorway, where a woman stood, with her back to the crowd, came a scream.

Then, like a flash, the woman, white-faced, turned upon the man.

"Some of you giants there better get out in the street quick! You're needed. Look there!"

A dozen men hurried to the door.

Surely enough they were needed, for Silas Harper had just come to a kind of trouble that only a strong man could ease.

In starting his horses with too hard a lashing, Silas had caused them to bolt.

In the bounce and the veering that followed Silas's wagon's body had come off the forward truck.

As Silas himself had been pitched out just half a second before, he now lay in the roadway, cursing and yelling with pain, one leg pinned down to the ground by the forward end of the heavy wagon body, while the maddened horses, hitched to the front wheels only, were making a swift dash down the street.

Three or four helpless people had stopped to look at Silas's trouble, but none of them seemed able to help, or even to think of it.

"Some of you strong men hustle over and lift that wagon box!" commanded the woman at the store doorway.

They started on the run, but they were too late.

Up the street, at a sprinting dash, had come a youngster.

No one of the score of townspeople knew him.

They did not even remember to have seen him before. Right beside the broken-down wagon and the injured man the boy halted.

One swift look he took—and then he got into action.

He was a puny enough looking boy, not more than five feet three in height, nor did he look as if he would weigh more than a hundred.

But, as he darted up to the wagon, he spat on his hands in the most hustling sort of way.

His run ended at the front of the wagon box.

Bending down, he gripped his hands under that box and lifted it.

Yes, sir. Lifted that massive box clear of the ground at the front end—lifted it full six inches up and away from Silas's broken left leg—and held it there.

"Some of you people lift the poor fellow out," he directed, coolly, and without panting.

"Don't you hear me?" he added, sharply, a moment later.

For these "strong men," paralyzed at what they saw, had halted, standing there open-mouthed in their astonishment.

Then Bud and Jim leaped forward, helping the boy to hold the wagon box clear.

"I don't need you," snapped the puny boy. "That man underneath does. I can hold this up."

By this time all the crowd had come more to its wits, especially when aided by some vigorous language from Silas with the broken leg.

Silas was pulled out and lifted into a wagon that had been halted close by. The driver and some friends started to take Silas Harper to the nearest doctor's office.

Now, at last, the crowd turned to look at the puny boy. No; he had proved that he wasn't puny; he only looked so.

"My gracious, boy, but you're terribly deceiving-looking!" gasped the woman who had first ordered the town's strong men to the rescue.

"Deceiving, ma'am?" smiled the boy. "I always try to be honest."

"But you look like a little mite that the wind could blow away!" argued the woman.

"I suppose the wind could, if it wanted to," assented the boy.

"Where did you get all that amazing strength, anyway?" persisted the woman, while the breathless crowd gaped.

"Oh, I came by it honestly, I give you my word for it," laughed the boy, and with that all the crowd laughed.

Then a man of thirty or so, a handsome, hustling-looking, well-dressed fellow sitting in a buggy, who had stopped and was questioning one of the men in the crowd, called out:

"Three cheers for Sandow, Junior—a boy of grit!"

The cheers came with a will, for the Blissvillains could be enthusiastic when they had any need to be.

Then one big farmer grabbed the boy suddenly, swinging him up to a seat on his great, broad right shoulder.

The contrast made "Sandow, Junior," look punier than ever.

The contrast, in fact, between this undersized youngster and the big, husky farmer brought out another roar of laughter.

"Bring him here, Holmes!" called the man in the buggy. "I want to shake hands with him, if he'll let me."

Laughingly the boy, perched on Farmer Holmes' shoulder, leaned over and shook hands with the man in the buggy.

"I'm Dr. George Bradley—always an admirer of strength and grit," announced the latter.

"And now three big cheers for Dr. George himself," shouted someone else.

The cheers were given with a roar that showed how popular the young doctor was in Blissville.

"Here's a dollar toward a fund for the young hero on the occasion," cried the doctor, dropping a bank-note into his straw hat. "Come forward, please, and add to it. Show your appreciation of what you've just seen."

Of course there were many in the growing crowd who hung back. But at least a dozen pressed forward.

First in the ranks was Sandow, Junior, himself. Holding up both hands to press his new friends back, he shouted, earnestly:

"No, no! Not that—please!"

"Won't you take the money, lad?" demanded Doc Bradley.

"No, I thank you."

"But this money isn't tainted," laughed the doctor.

"I don't want it, thank you."

There was a look of surprise on many faces at the declaration.

For the youngster, though as neat as a pin, looked anything but prosperous.

In fact it was plain that his suit had seen much hard service. It looked, indeed, as if it had not been new later than the summer before.

He was not really a handsome boy, but he had a pleasing face, and great, honest brown eyes that looked straight at you without a bit of conceit or trickery in them.

He didn't look really sickly, but he looked far from being as strong as the average boy, unless one who understood such things looked critically at the depth of his chest when he breathed and the straight squareness of his shoulders. But he was endowed with wonderful strength which he had carefully cultivated until now it was simply marvellous.

He stood there, as cool as a cucumber, neither reddening nor looking puffed up, while the crowd grew every instant.

"Will you give us your name, youngster?" asked Doc Bradley.

"Thomas Preston."

"From——"

"I beg your pardon, doctor?"

"Where do you hail from?"

ha "From the whole United States."

"Homeless!"

ste That word, coming from someone behind him, caused
de boy his first flush of unusual color.

"Excuse me," he retorted, turning swiftly around and
th ying to make out the person who had spoken too loudly.
ne I've got as good a mother as any fellow in this town.
es I don't want to tell all of my business, that's my own
fair."

"Quite!" nodded the young doctor, heartily. "And I
dn't mean to be prying, either."

"I didn't think for a second that you did, doctor," re-
f ined Sandow, Junior, quickly. "You didn't think I
neant that, did you?"

"No offense meant or taken," smiled the doctor, good-
naturedly, holding out his hand once more to the boy, who
ook it quickly.

The Blissvillains—that is, the latest newcomers in the
rowd, were now pressing forward as if trying to get a
ood look at a freak.

"Some circus boy out of a job!" spoke a light young
oice.

It was a mighty sweet voice, too, and that made Tom
urn quickly.

His face reddened, and tears almost got in his eyes
when he saw the girl who had spoken so lightly.

"You can't say that, Elsie, for you don't know," re-
turned the white-haired old man at her side.

But the girl tossed her head flippantly, as if it mattered
ittle, anyway.

And that hurt Tom Preston more than ever.

For he had taken a sudden tremendous liking to that
weet-faced, decidedly pretty girl.

She was perhaps sixteen, with eyes of deepest blue and
air of a medium shade that set off a delightfully peachy
omplexion in which there was just enough of color to
ake it delicious.

But she carried herself proudly, as if accustomed to
eing consulted and to having her own way in everything.

"Let us go on," she said, after a look at Tom that seem-
ed as if intended to show the hero of the occasion how
ittle an insignificant young fellow like him interested
er.

The old man started to move away, but he was not de-
tined to get away as quickly as that.

"Mr. Bright! Just the man I wanted to see!" sounded
big, rather rasping voice, as a broad-shouldered six-
ooter of forty pushed his way through the crowd.

"My attorney, Mr. Bright," announced the big man,
ragging forward a thin, ferret-faced man of middle age
a dingy black. "Mr. John Bright, Mr. Jasper Carbury,
ur foremost counsellor. Why, hullo, Miss Elsie! Aw-
ully glad to see you again!"

But the young miss chose to look almost bored as she
odded slightly.

"What's all the crowd here for?" demanded the big

man as he turned to look, half-scowlingly, at the little
throng around our hero.

Someone started to explain, but the big man, whom the
boy was now regarding closely, waved his hand.

"Tut! tut!" grunted the big man. "I'm not interested
in yarns about freaks."

Again Sandow, Junior, started, his face reddening.
And then his heart throbbed uneasily, for he saw the
pretty girl laughing as if she enjoyed the joke at his ex-
pense.

"Now, unless you people want to hear me discuss my
business," began the big man, and paused.

The hint was enough. At once the crowd began to move
in either direction along the street.

"Gracious! He must be of as much importance as he
thinks he is!" murmured the boy to himself. "The people
obey him as if he were the only policeman on earth."

"Now, Mr. Jarrett," began John Bright, in an eager
voice.

"Jarrett!" gasped the boy, once more starting. "Good
heavens! Have I found that fellow all at once? The
fellow I've been looking for for weeks—months! Is this
he?"

Tom, despite the strength he had shown recently, was
really trembling now.

The little color in his face had suddenly left it.

He leaned against the tree close at hand, but with his
face turned away that none might notice it.

The three men on the sidewalk were talking earnestly
now, and in low tones.

But just then the thin, shrill little voice of Lawyer Car-
bury broke in:

"Mr. Bright, when you're told a thing like that by
Richard Jarrett, you can always believe it."

"Richard! Richard Jarrett! Now, I know you, my
man," thrilled the boy. "And, oh, ain't I glad I've found
you!"

He did not start from his position, however, nor did
he give any other sign that he had heard anything.

Elsie Bright, looking slightly bored and wholly disdain-
ful, had walked a few steps past her father, and now stood
leaning slightly against a fence.

Jarrett, his head turning, suddenly caught sight of the
youngster by the tree, not more than six feet away.

"Boy," rasped the big man, "what do you want here?"

"Nothing in particular," rejoined Tom Preston, calmly.

"Then you may move on!"

"Thank you."

But he did not budge.

"You may move on, I say!" roared Jarrett.

"I heard you."

"Then why don't you go?"

"Am I obliged to give you my reasons for remaining
on a public street?" queried the boy, turning and looking
coolly at the big fellow.

As he looked he caught a sudden, amused gleam in
Elsie's eyes.

She looked at him nodding, as if to egg him on.

Richard Jarrett walked angrily up to the boy, resting a heavy paw on Tom's shoulder.

But, to the big man's intense astonishment, Tom's small left hand closed over that big paw and pushed it promptly away.

"Hands off, please," urged the boy. "Take a fellow of your size!"

"Boy, I told you to get away from here!" roared the big man.

"And who are you?" questioned the boy, looking up into the man's red, angry eyes.

Richard Jarrett gasped, for the simple reason that he was not used to being asked such questions in the town that he felt he owned.

If there was any real estate in Blissville that Jarrett didn't own, the chances were that he had a mortgage on it.

He reached out with his heavy right hand to grab the boy by the arm. He got hold of it. But Tom, without budging from his position, threw the grasp off with an ease that made the big man start with astonishment.

"Boy," he gasped, "I'm used to being obeyed in this town."

"Yes?" sneered Preston. "Well, you may think you're George Washington, Julius Cæsar and the Kaiser Wilhelm all rolled into one—but I think you're a stiff!"

The instant that he had used that word in Elsie Bright's hearing the boy felt ashamed of himself.

But his own shame was nothing to the humiliated anger of the town's big man.

"See here, boy," he growled, "I want you to get out of this town on the run, and keep away. Will you do it?"

"No!" flared Sandow, Junior, promptly.

"You'll be sorry if you don't!" warned the big man, menacingly.

"Oh, you go to blazes!" snapped the boy, coolly. "You make me feel sleepy!"

Again Jarrett gasped with anger. Then, with a snort, he wheeled, beckoning to a man on the other side of the street—a man on whose breast glittered a white star.

"Officer!" called Jarrett.

Across the street on the double quick came the constable.

"Johnson," announced the big man, "I want you to take this young loafer to the station-house."

"All right, sir," replied the constable, respectfully. "What's the charge, sir?"

"Charge him with being a vagrant, and see that he's sent away for a year or two, Johnson."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll drop into the courtroom in the morning to add my word, Johnson."

"Very good, sir."

Richard Jarrett turned to look at the dumfounded boy. Sandow, Junior, was more than dumfounded.

He was terrified, in fact.

For, without a nickel in his pocket, without a job, or

any prospect of one, and unable to prove that he had an one to look after him——

Why, in fact, he was a vagrant within the meaning of the law.

And a vagrant is locked up for the good of the community!

CHAPTER II.

THE DEALER IN "SKIN GAMES."

John Bright, honest old soul that his face proclaimed him to be, had looked on in troubled silence.

He was an old man, who had seen many reverses in life and he knew better than to "knock" or make enemies of his age.

Yet his whole sense of justice revolted at what was being done before his eyes.

"Mr. Jarrett," he called, mildly, "don't you think that's—er—just a bit unfair."

"I do not," returned the big man, stiffly.

"I think it's a shame!" cried the girl, moving forward. Her face flushed, and her eyes blazing just a bit.

"Elsie!" protested her father.

"I call it the act of a bully and a coward!" defied the girl. "Mr. Jarrett, after this please be good enough—"

"Elsie!"

"Be good enough not to speak to me after this, Mr. Jarrett!" finished the girl, hotly.

"Why—er—Miss Elsie," stammered the big man, easily, "if you——"

"I don't!" denied the girl, turning on her heel and walking away, while her father went swiftly after her, his trouble filling his weak old blue eyes.

"What's this going on, Johnson?" rang a sharp voice as a buggy drew up near.

It was Dr. Bradley, driving back that way.

And now he looked in very genuine astonishment at the sight of the late hero, now meek and mute in the grip of the stern law.

"Boy arrested for being a vagrant," gruffed the constable, still keeping his hold on Tom's collar.

"Stuff and nonsense!" snorted Dr. Bradley. "What makes such a charge as that?"

"I did," replied Jarrett, looking in fixed anger at the daring young physician.

"You ought to know better at your age," returned the doctor, coldly.

"And a doctor who's trying to build up a practice in a small town ought to look out for some people," hinted Lawyer Carbury in his thin, shrill voice.

"Pooh!" jeered Bradley. "It's well enough known now that I have all the square and decent people of the town on my lists. As for making that boy out a vagrant, you can't do it."

"Can you prove that he has a job and a home?" sniffed Lawyer Carbury.

"Easily enough," smiled the doctor, coolly. "He's looking for a job, I believe. He can have the position of office boy up at my house. I'll tell the justice so, if I have to."

Constable Johnson turned, with a troubled look in his face, at the magnate of Blissville.

"Oh, let the boy go, Johnson," growled the big man. "I had no idea he had so many friends."

Johnson's grip fell away from the boy's collar.

Tom could have thrown up his hat and cheered—his heart had suddenly become so much lighter!

He turned toward Elsie, lifting his hat to her as politely as he knew how.

But that disdainful young lady, now that he was out of his trouble, appeared to have lost all interest in him.

She turned her back after a brief nod.

Stabbed to the heart once more by the thoughtless possessor of a face that promised better things, Sandow, Junior, turned to energetic Dr. Bradley.

"Jump in and go home with me," nodded the physician, making room on the buggy seat. "Now, then, Preston," as the buggy rolled out of ear-shot, "do you really want a job with me?"

"If I could take a job anywhere, I'd like to have it with you," the boy cried gratefully. "But at present I've got something else on my hands that won't allow me to take any kind of a job."

"Has that something got to be done in this town?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, Preston, try to keep out of the way of that bully, Jarrett, as much as you can. He's all-powerful in this town, and rarely forgets a grudge. But now, as it's near supper time, you'll come home and have supper with me. After that, we'll see if there's anything that can be done to push you on. Do you know, Preston, I've taken a liking to you?"

"I'm mighty glad of that," rejoined the boy, so heartily that there could be no doubt he spoke the truth.

So friendless, homeless Tom Preston went out to the pretty little cottage that Dr. Bradley owned.

It was just past the edge of the town, out on the main street.

The doctor being an old bachelor, his house was managed for him by a sweet-faced, elderly woman, Mrs. Grant.

After the meal, at which Bradley did most of the talking, he took the boy out on the porch, and, in his friendly way, tried to draw the youngster out.

There wasn't so much to be learned. Sandow, Junior, hadn't seen his mother in more than half a year.

They had been separated in New York City, and the boy's efforts to get tidings of his mother had proved fruitless.

Her name was Thorvald now, she having married a second time, and having become a widow again.

Poor as church mice, mother and son, they had had something of a fight for existence.

But there was something else through which they hoped for comfort.

What that something was Dr. Bradley did not attempt to find out.

But he shrewdly understood that it must be connected in some way with Blissville, since young Preston had declared that he must remain here in town for the present.

"My heart aches for the boy, if he's really got to stay here in town after having made an enemy of Jarrett," mused the doctor to himself.

Then he exclaimed, laughingly:

"Do you know, Preston, I've failed in getting quite a bit of practice here in this town, simply because of a pun I made when I first came here. I had the bad taste to refer to the people of this town as Blissvillains. That stuck in the crops of some people, and they'd die before they'd send for me."

"It was a good joke, though," smiled Sandow, Junior. "And it seems to fit some people in this town, too."

"Oh, as to that," said the young doctor, with sudden earnestness, "I feel like giving you one bit of advice that you'll do well to follow. If you've got to stay in this town, even at some sacrifice to your feelings you want to go easily with Richard Jarrett. Don't rough him the wrong way. Be as smooth with him as you know how."

"I intend to be as smooth with him as I can," rejoined the boy, with sudden soberness. "I've got to—for more reasons than one."

"Oh!"

Dr. Bradley looked straight into the boy's eyes.

Sandow, Junior, nodded.

"Yes; you've been such a mighty good friend, doctor, that I may as well admit, for your ear alone, that my business in this town concerns Richard Jarrett."

"Does he know it?"

"If he did," replied Tom Preston, with a sickly smile, "there wouldn't be any use in my staying here."

"You needn't be afraid of my giving you away, then," promised the young medical man. "I've altogether too many reasons for feeling a grudge against the fellow. He has done his best to drive me out of town—and all because I wouldn't do something for him once that would have been mighty shady. But that, also, is between us two, Preston. And now I've got to get my horse out and make one evening call. Since you've declined to sleep here to-night, may I at least drop you down somewhere in the village?"

"If you'll be so good," Tom replied, eagerly. "And let me hitch that horse up for you, please."

A few minutes later our hero was set down in the business part of Main street, and Dr. Bradley drove on.

"It came awfully hard to refuse that kindly-offered bed," smiled the boy, bitterly, to himself, as he strolled slowly along the street. "I wonder how long it is since I've slept in a real bed? I've lost the count. But what's that rascal, Jarrett, doing with old Mr. Bright? Another piece of stealing, I'm ready to swear. Oh, if I could only

go to that weak, gentle old man and make him believe the whole story I could tell about Jarrett and my dead stepfather, Thorvald! Good old Otto Thorvald! The simple, trusting, unsuspecting genius! And you, Jarrett! If I can ever get the screws on you!"

He stopped suddenly, for he had just come to the Blissville House, the front porch of which was but a score of feet back from the sidewalk on which the Blissvillains were getting their evening air.

There, down at the further end of the porch, sat Jarrett and his rascally-looking lawyer.

They were bending forward, talking in low, earnest tones.

There was no one near them, for the people of this little town seemed to know better than to intrude on the privacy of their great man—their bullying, grasping, hard-headed great man!

But Tom Preston, at his first sight of those two eager faces, stopped with a swift thrill.

"They haven't seen me yet," he throbbed. "And there's something up. I can do it!"

"It" consisted of nothing less than drawing back, slipping around at the back of the little hotel, and coming up on the side that would land our hero within a few feet of the two schemers, unobserved.

Moving with the stealth of a cat, Tom carried out his plan.

Lawyer and client were seated at the very end of the porch, close to the wall of the building.

Keeping close to the wall that joined, Tom was able to get within six feet of them.

And he was hidden from the view of the street by a lilac bush that stood just at the corner of the building.

But, though Tom crouched and strained his ears, all he could hear, at first, was an indistinct murmur of voices.

"Just to get hold of something, some point in Jarrett's affairs that will give me a chance to put the screws on!" throbbed the eager boy. "Then, perhaps, I can make him listen to me!"

Sadow, Junior, though he looked as mild and meek as he was puny, had the bull-dog in him!

He could hang to a single purpose through life, if necessary.

And now, suddenly, he gave a jump of joy, for he heard something that pleased him.

"Old man Bright thinks I'm not generous enough with him," he heard Jarrett say, in a slightly louder voice.

"But you've given him three thousand dollars, and he has been living in comfort on the money," objected Lawyer Carbury's shrill voice, now sunk almost to a whisper.

"Yes; but of course he expected to be a rich man out of his invention by this time," replied Jarrett.

"He didn't know," chuckled the lawyer, "that in coming to you he made sure only of making you rich!"

"Well," contended Jarrett, "of course I'm not going to supply the brains, the push and the money, and then turn everything over to the measly inventor."

"The invention really is a prime thing, isn't it?"

"Of course! Else I wouldn't be in it," returned Jarrett, easily. "I've got to make most of the money when I go into a thing."

"So I've heard before," pulsed the listening boy.

"Going to give Bright any more money above the three thousand, Mr. Jarrett?" asked the lawyer.

"I wouldn't, only I've got to get his final signature. Carbury, what I want you to do is to draw up a cleverly-worded paper—you know how to do the right thing in that line! Have the paper look innocent enough, but it must really be a deed conveying to me all the remaining rights in the invention. Make the consideration two thousand dollars."

"And that will be the last cent that Bright is to get out of his idea?" chuckled the lawyer. "Mr. Jarrett, you are certainly a clever man!"

"Oh, yes," mimicked the listening boy, vengefully.

"Well, no," said Jarrett, slowly, and in that same cautious tone which just barely reached the young eavesdropper. "There's more to my plan, Carbury."

"There's bound to be," said the lawyer, admiringly.

"After Bright gets that two thousand dollars we'll encourage him to spend it as rapidly as possible."

"What's that for?"

"So he'll be broke, of course," yawned the rich man.

"And then?"

"Why, then, when he can't make a cent or find one, perhaps that pretty slip of a girl of his will be prepared to think about becoming rich Mrs. Jarrett and helping her poor old daddy out."

"You don't mean that, Mr. Jarrett!" protested the lawyer.

"Oh, yes, I do! I've been a widower for seven years, and that pretty face has caught my fancy."

"She's as good as Mrs. Jarrett already, then!" coughed the lawyer.

"Is she?" demanded Sadow, Junior, flushing hotly in his place of concealment. "Why, to save a girl like that from a beast like this, I—I could almost shoot him from ambush! No, I couldn't do that! It would be too sneaking! But wouldn't I like a good excuse to get my hands on him!"

"I think I can handle this Bright game all right for you," smirked Lawyer Carbury. "Do you know, Mr. Jarrett, it makes me think of another slick case?"

"Thorvald's?" asked the rich man.

In a twinkling Tom Preston leaned far forward.

"Yes, Thorvald's," nodded the lawyer.

"I remember that case. You handled it with splendid skill, Carbury."

"Oh, that was not so hard," smiled the lawyer, modestly. "Thorvald was just such another timid, easy fool as this old man Bright. Do you remember how easily we got away from Thorvald the only proof he had that he was really the inventor of that wonderful bit of machinery?"

"Of course I do," nodded Jarrett. "And then he was

glad enough to take the thousand I offered him and drop the matter. I was looking that matter over to-day, Carbury, for all the papers in the Thorvald matter are in my office at present."

"In your safe?" demanded the lawyer, quickly.

"Yes."

"Then I'd advise you, Mr. Jarrett, to get them put away in some big and strong vault at once. Those Thorvald papers are going to be tremendously important."

"You're right there, for once in your life!" quavered the listening boy.

He swallowed hard. Then, despite all he could do, he coughed.

"What's that?" demanded Jarrett, leaping to his feet.

Then he bounded down from the porch and past the screening lilac bush.

Sandow, Junior, and the King of Greed were face to face for a battle of strength or wits!

CHAPTER III.

JARRETT TAKES A DROP.

"It's that same young vagrant!" stormed Jarrett.

His face was white, first off, then grew very red.

"Dear me!" murmured Lawyer Carbury, gliding forward, snake-fashion.

"You young scoundrel, what are you doing here?" demanded Jarrett, glowering at the boy.

But Tom Preston had had time to get his wits to work.

He ached to pass hard names back, but that would be sure to bring out the fact that he had overheard the conversation.

"Why, I was taking a nap back of this bush," he replied, coolly. "Have I disturbed you?"

"Taking a nap!" scoffed Jarrett.

"Yes; until I woke up coughing."

"That's a pretty story!"

"I'm glad you like it."

Tom's face, as he delivered this meaningless retort, was an utter blank.

If he had been as stupid as he looked just then, he wouldn't have known enough to get through life.

But Jarrett, too, was getting his second wind on thought. It wouldn't exactly do to accuse the boy of playing the spy, for that would be to admit that there had been something to spy out.

"See here," he growled, "I thought I told you to clear out—to leave this town for good."

"Didn't I make it plain that I'd please myself about that?" returned the boy, smilingly.

"Carbury, hold my hat," cried the rich big man, passing that article into his lawyer's hands.

He was red in the face from the realization that out on

the sidewalk a dozen people had halted and were looking wonderingly on.

"I'll give you just one good thrashing!" roared the irate magnate.

"Yes?" asked Tom, coolly.

"Then you'll keep away from this town."

"If you win—yes, perhaps."

"Take that, you little puppy!"

Sandow, Junior, did "take" it, and he knew just what to do with it.

"It" was an ugly blow aimed at the side of his head, for Jarrett was no boxer and did not know how to send in a blow right.

Sandow, Junior, simply ducked in under that swinging arm, dropped upon his knees, and seized the big man just behind each knee.

Wrench! Sandow, Junior, drew his man forward and down upon the ground, dodging nimbly out of the way of the falling mass of two hundred and twenty pounds.

Then Tom was up on his feet again, laughing with enjoyment.

"Is that the way you always do it?" he asked, wonderingly.

"You little whelp!" roared Jarrett, jumping to his feet again.

There was a snicker from someone in the growing crowd on the sidewalk.

"Ten to one on little David. Goliath's got no show!" piped a boy's gleeful voice from the street.

Lawyer Carbury, gasping with astonishment, stood on tiptoe to see if he could recognize the boy, so that his employer could take dire vengeance on the boy's parents later.

But Richard Jarrett, feeling like a fool before the gaping crowd, became an enraged fool also.

"Get out of these grounds, you young tramp!" roared the rich man.

He reached forward with both hands to grab Sandow, Junior, and rush him into the street.

But Tom, nimble as a squirrel, dodged to one side, caught one of those arms with both steel-like hands, and began to twist.

He twisted like a good one.

"O-o-oh! Ouch! Let go, you little thief!" howled Jarrett, while the crowd on the sidewalk grew.

Flop! With an agonizing wrench at that big arm, the boy, who looked puny, twisted the gripped arm until Jarrett yielded and went down to the grass.

Lawyer Carbury danced around like a mad cricket, but not daring to risk his precious skin by bolting into the fray.

"Help! help!" shrilled the lawyer. "Why don't someone help?"

"Why don't you help yourself?" came back a jeering retort from someone in the gaping crowd.

That sounded reasonable. Lawyer Carbury danced closer to his groaning employer, who was writhing and

almost sobbing, while Tom stood over him keeping up the twist on that suffering arm.

"In the name of the law, stop!" ordered the counsellor.

But Tom, paying no heed whatever to this human mosquito, gave another twist.

"Murder!" yelled Jarrett.

He tried to get in a blow with his left fist, but watchful young Preston was too nimble.

"See here," went on the boy, coolly but sternly, "you called me a tramp and a thief. Did you mean it, Jarrett?"

"Yes! Oh, oh, oh! No!"

"What am I, then?"

"You little——"

"Careful!"

Tom put the twist on harder again.

"You're a—oh!——"

"Go on! You're doing well!" mocked the boy. What am I?"

"You're a—oh, oh, oh!"

"Well?"

"You're a splendid, honest, noble fellow!"

"You'll swear to that?" insisted our hero, calmly.

"Yes, yes!"

"Then, swear!"

"Oh, oh, o-o-o-oh! I swear that you're—oh!—all that's noble in a young man!"

"Good!" nodded Tom. "Now, what are you, yourself?"

"Oh, oh, o-o-o-oh! I'm a——"

Wretch!

"I'm everything that's bad!" moaned Jarrett, the cold sweat standing out on his forehead under the agony of that twisted arm.

"And vile?" hinted Preston, with another twist.

"And vile! O-o-o-oh! Let me up in the name of mercy!"

Quite satisfied, Tom Preston let go of that captured arm, springing nimbly back.

"First round is David's! Goliath comes up groggy for the second!" bellowed a laughing voice.

There were a hundred people on the sidewalk and in the hotel grounds by this time.

Nor had anyone taken the trouble to think of interfering, except for Lawyer Carbury.

He now darted forward, shaking a long, thin, claw-like finger threateningly in our hero's face.

"Oh, you infamous little scoundrel, you shall pay for this!" screamed the lawyer.

"Now?" queried Sandow, Junior, taking a step forward.

"No, no, no!" gasped the cautious man of the law, turning and fleeing. "I was only fooling!"

"What's all this row about?" demanded a voice full of authority. "Make way there!"

Through the crowd pushed Constable Johnson.

Jarrett, standing limply against one of the pillars of the porch, wheeled about.

"You're a bit late, officer—as usual," exclaimed the big man, cuttingly. "I've just been outrageously assaulted."

"You—you have, sir?" gasped Johnson, almost unbelievably. "Who—who did it?"

"That boy threw me down and twisted my right arm all out of shape!" accused Jarrett.

That was more of a "facer" than ever.

From the hundred-pound boy, hardly over five feet in height, to the six-footer of two hundred and twenty, Johnson looked incredulously.

Then he gasped:

"Impossible!"

"Do it over again, kid, and show the cop!" roared an unruly voice from the street.

"Do you mean to doubt my word, Johnson?" cried Jarrett, angrily.

"Oh, no, sir! No, sir!" the constable made haste to assure the big man of the town.

"Oh, the boy soaked him right and proper!" asserted that informing voice from the street. "He could do it again, too, if he does look like a consumptive. Oh, he's a husky wonder, that kid!"

"What shall I do, Mr. Jarrett?" asked the constable, respectfully.

"Now, what do you think you'd better do when a citizen is assaulted with every sign of violence?" jeered Jarrett, harshly.

"I'd wait a minute and think this over," proposed a voice that was coming nearer while its owner spoke.

It was Dr. Bradley, who, having pulled up in his passing buggy just in time to see the trouble start, had remained on the spot until now.

"You've got nothing to say about this, Doc," growled the officer. "You ain't the complainant."

"But I'll be a witness—and a strong one! And so will half a hundred here if you arrest the boy for defending himself!" asserted Dr. Bradley.

There came a ringing cheer from a dozen men in the crowd.

"Jarrett started this assault—started it twice, in fact, and then had to come down to begging for mercy from this little pigmy," went on Dr. Bradley, ironically.

"That's right!" roared several voices from the street.

Lawyer Carbury was standing now where he could see and note the names of some of the speakers for future vengeance.

"Jarrett, are you going to have the boy arrested?" insisted the young physician.

"Doctor, I believe I'm not compelled to answer you," sneered the rich man of Blissville.

"You'd look great in court—you two!" laughed the doctor. "You, Mr. Jarrett, deposing and saying on oath that this little fellow, about up to your shoulder, threw you down and made you sing humble, just because you tried to thrash him and couldn't."

Jarrett was fuming, his face white with the shame of seeing all these people gaping at him, and most of them

grinning—these people who had always seemed to look upon him as a truly great man.

He couldn't stand it, so turned and bolted into the hotel.

"Come along, lad," smiled Dr. Bradley.

Constable Johnson, in the absence of a definite complaint from Jarrett, hesitated about making an arrest for an assault he hadn't seen.

"Why, it's little Sandow, Junior, again—the pocket giant who lifted the wagon off Silas Harper this afternoon!" recognized someone.

Then the cheering began. Carbury was busy making mental notes of the names of villagers who were to feel the weight of Jarrett's wrath later on.

"Get into the buggy," whispered Bradley.

And Tom stepped in and was driven rapidly away.

But two blocks off the boy murmured:

"Stop now, please, and let me out."

"Why?"

"I seem bound to get in trouble, doctor, and I don't want to drag you in with me."

"Drag me in?" pooh-poohed the young medical man.

"Why, if this keeps on, everyone in town who hates Jarrett will send for me when they are sick."

"Oh, I appreciate all your goodness," protested Sandow, Junior, gratefully. "But I don't want to get you into any more trouble. Put me down, please."

So Dr. Bradley complied.

Tom was now so far from the scene of his late exploit that he found the street at this point nearly deserted.

"There's your friend's office," nodded Dr. Bradley, inclining his head toward a handsome office building at the right.

Then he drove on, while Tom crossed the street, looking up at the big, handsome office building with stores on the ground floor.

Up there on three of the windows, in white letters, appeared the name of Richard Jarrett.

Further on, on two other windows of the same floor, appeared the legend:

"Jasper Carbury, Attorney and Counsellor-at-Law."

"Counsellor at almost any kind of dirty work, this particular lawyer," muttered Tom.

But his gaze went back to Jarrett's windows.

"In those offices," he throbbed, with a trembling start, "are the very papers that I'd give my life to get my hands on! And only some locks—and the law—keep me from handling those papers."

The big general street entrance to the offices above was open.

Tom stepped inside, curiously.

There was no late tenant in the hallway, but some late-going tenant had left the street door open.

Tom was curiously studying the names on the wall directory inside when he heard steps in the street, then the voice of Jarrett made him jump:

"It won't take us but a few minutes, Carbury."

"Better do it now, then," sounded the lawyer's voice.

Tom drew back in the darkest shadow, shrinking his small body up until it occupied the least possible space in that dark corner.

In came the two men and passed on up the stairs without seeing him.

"I know right where the papers are," Jarrett confided, in a low tone.

Papers! That word was enough to set Tom Preston's blood on fire.

For the life of him he could not help following.

Reaching the head of the stairs, he waited, out of sight, until he heard the men unlocked a door and passed inside.

Then once more along the dark hallway stole Tom, guided by a light that shone out through an open doorway.

Close to the open door, he stopped, his heart thumping.

For a minute the two rascals talked in undertones.

Then he heard them step into an inner office.

Swift as thought, Tom crept forward, peering in.

There stood a great safe, its door swung open.

"The papers! Mother's papers—mine! In that safe!" throbbed the boy, turning hot and cold. "Could I find them?"

Listening for a moment to the two plotters murmuring their plans in the inner office, Sandow, Junior, praying for luck, slipped into that inner office.

Before the safe he stood, trembling.

"There's ever so many papers here—which?" he quivered, feverishly eyeing the many rows of neatly-folded documents in the compartments exposed before him.

He was bending forward—a step! Then another, in the corridor outside.

"Carbury, here's that young wretch in my office!" sounded Jarrett's amazed voice.

He leaped from the inner office, followed by his attorney.

And Tom, hearing steps also in the corridor, straightened up by the open safe, not moving.

"You thief!" bellowed Jarrett, hoarsely. "Robbing my safe!"

"Eh?" rang the voice of one astounded out in the corridor.

Constable Johnson sprang into the room, eager to distinguish himself.

"You're just in time now, officer!" rang Jarrett's accusing voice. "Carbury and I came here to my offices, only to find this young burglar, with my safe door open, just ready to go through things."

"We came just in time to catch the burglar in the act!" piped Jasper Carbury, excitedly.

Nor did Sandow, Junior, know what to say this time.

Trapped!

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIEND FOR LIFE.

White as death under the flickering yellow gaslight stood Tom Preston.

Circumstantial evidence!

There was not a blessed thing to say for himself.

Jarrett, the big man of the town, and a practicing lawyer, were his accusers.

Their presence of mind had been swift enough for them to realize at once how they could accuse him without his having a chance to defend himself.

And here stood the constable, a perpetual prowler in the interests of Jarrett, ready to swear the boy's liberty away.

"I'm all in, now!" gasped the boy, inwardly.

Yet he had so schooled himself in the appearance of coolness that he seemed, as he stood there merely to be waiting for someone else's first move.

Constable Johnson, with a trembling hand, reached for his revolver—and produced it.

The officer, though not a small man, had heard such prodigious accounts of the strength of Sandow, Junior, that he was wisely taking no chances.

"The case seems slick enough," grimaced the officer.

"Slick enough?" repeated Jarrett, scornfully. "Why not? Carbury and I come down the corridor, meaning to look over some business matters here. We find the door open, gas lighted, my safe door opened, and this young burglar on his knees before the safe door, ready to go through my valuables and cash."

"A very exact statement of the evidence," chimed in Carbury, shrilly.

That wise lawyer was taking pains to keep behind the body of his big employer.

Tom glanced from one to another of the trio, his glance resting last of all on Johnson.

"Well?" demanded the boy in a hard, dry voice, as he stood still. "What are you going to do with me?"

"Don't you dare resist," warned Johnson, leveling his weapon.

"Oh, I don't intend to," spoke Tom, drearily. "Not being a crook, I have a good deal of respect for the law—too much to resist an officer who's doing what he thinks is his duty."

"Throw up your hands," ordered Johnson.

"Oh, that isn't necessary," smiled Tom, contemptuously. "I'm not as desperate as all that."

"Throw up your hands," quavered the constable, "or I'll kill ye!"

"No, you wouldn't; you only think you would," smiled the boy, coolly, some of the color coming back to his face. "It isn't necessary to kill me, anyway. I tell you, I know too much to try to resist an officer. Why, you can put handcuffs on me, if you want."

"A good idea," nodded the constable. "Mr. Jarrett, will you please take them out of my left hip pocket while I keep this young desperado covered?"

Tom smiled his contempt as he turned his back to Jarrett, putting his hands behind him and submitting to the manacling.

"There, now, that's safe and sensible," approved Law-

yer Carbury, stepping forward with relief written all over his face. "This lying, thieving young scoundrel——"

Snap! By a strong twitch of his wrists Tom had broken the steel chain connecting the steel bracelets.

"Mercy!" gasped the pallid lawyer, retreating swiftly behind the big body of Jarrett.

"Now, what do you want me to do, officer?" queried the boy.

"March out of that door, just ahead of me," ordered the constable. "Don't try to get away, either, or I'll shoot ye down without mercy. Remember!"

"Pshaw!" gritted Sandow, Junior, as he moved steadily toward the door. "Try to get it out of your fool noddle that I'm going to fight an officer. If everybody was as easy to arrest as I am, you could have school girls for policemen in this town!"

"Blarney don't fool no one!" jibed the constable, following down the corridor with the muzzle of his weapon trained on the small of the boy's back.

"No, no, you'll do all the fooling of yourself that's necessary," mocked Preston.

Jarrett and his lawyer, stopping only long enough to lock the safe and the office doors, followed into the street.

Where does a crowd come from on a quiet street? In less time than one could believe a throng of people was following Sandow, Junior, on his progress to the lock-up.

There was help in abundance to make sure that the boy was properly locked up.

The cell was a new and a strong one—one that would undoubtedly defy all the amazing strength that this bit of a boy seemed to possess.

Click! The spring-lock of the cell door had closed. Johnson, Jarrett, Carbury, two other constables and a few citizens stood staring through the bars at the desperate criminal.

"When you galoots get tired of looking," announced Tom, drearily, "I'll have some time to do my thinking."

"Cool," gruffed Johnson, whose last act had been to remove the bracelets from the boy's wrists. "You really dangerous criminals are always that way! We'll keep a strong guard on this lockup to-night, or one of the worst gangs in the country might turn up to rescue this desperado at the point of the pistol."

"Oh, Lord!" gasped Carbury.

"Say," taunted Tom, "ain't you afraid, Carbury, that some of my desperate pals will dog you around until they get you and finish you? Eh?"

"Mercy!" The white-faced Carbury hastened out of the cellroom corridor.

And soon Sandow, Junior, was left to himself, save for the solitary officer, one of Johnson's comrades, who remained on duty just outside the cell door.

And Tom?

Finding a bench at one side of the cell, he threw himself down upon it, lying there on his back, staring up at the near whitewashed ceiling.

"I don't see any way out of this!" he groaned. "Of

course Jarrett and Carbury are citizens whose word will be taken by a judge or a jury. And that fool constable was convinced enough so that he'll be ready to swear to their story. Tom, lad, being homeless, friendless, penniless, I guess you're in for it! Even a fellow better fixed than I am would have to serve time on such evidence."

For a few moments he shuddered, as the terror of the thing dawned on him more and more.

But by degrees his mind grew clearer and more grit flashed from his eyes.

"The least I can do is to keep cool about it," he gritted. "Some day I'll be free again—yes, I guess I'll easily be a man by that time. Then I can start all over again—and better luck next time!"

Then the officer outside heard the deep, regular breathing of a tired, sleeping boy.

But Tom was not destined to sleep long.

"Wake up in there!" cried a deep, hearty voice.

Sandow, Junior, sat up, rubbing his heavy eyelids.

"Dr. Bradley?" he cried, unbelievably.

"Yes, and you're keeping me running to-day, younker, aren't you?" called the doctor. "You're worse than the worst patient I ever had. But get up and stretch. Constable, unlock that door."

Unlock the door? Why, in the name of all that was wonderful, that was exactly what the officer was doing!

Tom stepped out in a daze.

There behind the doctor stood Johnson. Did that fellow never sleep?

Johnson looked grim and disapproving.

"Come this way," said Dr. Bradley, taking the boy by the arm and leading him back to the office of the station-house.

There stood a fussy little old man in black, standing beside the tall desk.

"Up with your right hand," ordered this man.

Like one in a trance Tom obeyed. He repeated some words, as he was told to do. Then he and Dr. Bradley signed a paper.

"Come on, now, youngster," called Bradley, cheerily, taking the dazed boy by the arm.

"Back to the cell?" demanded Sandow, Junior.

"Back to the cell?" echoed Dr. Bradley, while someone else laughed. "Not by a long shot! Out into the world with you!"

"But I don't understand," protested Tom Preston.

"Don't you? Didn't you hear what the judge said?" queried Dr. Bradley, as he piloted our hero into the cooler air of the night outside.

"The judge? Was that my trial? Am I really free?"

"Trial? Of course not! But you're admitted to bail—one thousand dollars. Judge Gosling, who is a creature of Jarrett's, hated like thunder to come down to take bail to-night, but he had to, for there really wasn't any excuse he could give."

"But who put up a thousand dollars for me?" quivered the still dazed boy.

"I did. That is, I put up my house as security. That's all the property I have in the world. So, if you should skip, Preston, I'd be a whole ruined community!"

"Skip?" repeated the boy, scornfully. "And leave you in a hole when you've been so good to me? Of course I wouldn't!"

"Of course you wouldn't," agreed Dr. Bradley, heartily, as he laughingly pushed the astonished Sandow, Junior, up into his buggy. "If you're crooked, Sandow, then I'm no judge of faces!"

"But how did you know about this?" quizzed the puzzled boy, as Bradley sent the mare along at a clipping pace.

"Oh, a friend of yours brought me word."

"A friend of mine? I didn't know I had one—except you."

"Oh, this boy is a friend of yours, fast enough!"

"A boy?"

"Keep cool, and you'll see him mighty soon. He's out on this road a bit, waiting to shake hands with you."

"But I can't imagine who he is."

It was so evident that the doctor was trying to keep a secret that Tom did not press him for further information.

They drove out of town a way past the thicker residence part, and then, by a little clump of woods, Dr. Bradley drew rein.

"Ned!" he called softly.

Out from under the shadow of the trees quickly moved a boy of about the same age as Sandow, Junior—that is to say, about seventeen.

"Sandow," remarked Bradley, smilingly, "jump down and shake hands with your friend, Ned Bostwick."

Not even guessing what it meant, but knowing that Bradley's was a good lead to follow in anything, our hero vaulted down to the ground, tightly gripping the hand of the other boy.

"Whew! Not quite so hard a handshake, please," begged Ned, laughingly. "You must remember that we're not all Sandows."

"I'm mighty glad to see you, anyway," smiled Tom, eagerly.

"And you don't know why, either," quizzed Ned, looking frankly into Preston's eyes.

"Oh, it's because Doc told me to be glad," laughed Tom. "I'll discover the other reasons soon."

"Geddap!" clucked the doctor to his horse, and drove off, leaving them there.

"This all seems mighty strange, I know," smiled Ned. "But I asked Dr. Bradley to do it."

"Then it's all right," smiled back the mystified Tom, letting go his new friend's hand.

"Oh, I'll make it clear," promised Ned Bostwick, turning. "Let's go off through the woods together, and we can talk as we go. Sandow, what's your real name?"

Our hero told him.

"Now, see here, Tom," went on the other boy, earnestly,

"once in a while I see a thing and know it. So I know that you're in a good deal of trouble."

"A good guess for once," Tom admitted, with a sigh as he thought of that hearing on the burglary charge awaiting him in the morning.

"And when a fellow's in trouble he needs a friend," pursued the other boy.

"Say, you're a real guesser, Ned Bostwick!"

"I've seen a bit of you to-day," pursued the other boy. "I saw you lift that wagon box off Silas Harper. I happened to be in the crowd that cheered you when you licked Jarrett. Say, that showed you could scrap. And it showed another thing. The way you let up on that scoundrel showed me there wasn't anything mean in you. And then I happened to be in the crowd that saw you juggled to-night. Now," declared Ned, earnestly, stopping and looking our hero keenly in the eye, "I don't care a hang what anybody else may think, but I know you're no thief."

"Shake!" gulped Tom Preston.

They shook then and there—the pledge of a long, honest friendship.

"When a fellow's in trouble, he always wants a friend," continued Ned. "I know I do, for I'm in a bit of trouble myself, and I can't find the fellow around here that I really want for a friend, so I made up my mind I'd be cheeky enough to ask you to be my friend."

"Cheeky!" gasped Tom. "I like that. Why, you're generous!"

"Glad you think so," blinked the other boy, a bit embarrassed. "Anyway, when I saw the cop driving you down the street I knew something had to be done. Dr. Bradley was the only one I could think of."

"He's a brick!"

"Well, Doc thought a minute, and then he ran out to his barn and hitched up. On the way down the road I told him what I wanted. He said all right, go ahead. Said he didn't know any two fellows better matched for being friends. Will you take me, Tom Preston, on Doc's recommend?"

"Take you? Why, I'd take Old Nick himself on Doc Bradley's say-so!"

"Shake again!"

"I asked Bradley where you're stopping, and he said that was just the trouble," explained Ned, frankly. "So I've fixed it up that you're going home with me."

"Oh, no, not that!" cried Sandow, Junior, drawing back.

"Funny," remarked Ned. "Doc said that was just what you'd say. He tried it on you. But, say, you'll go with me. Listen! We've got a small barn, and some hay in it. I got mother's permish to sleep there to-night on the hay—it's so hot indoors. So you'll just roll in on the hay, along with me. It won't cost anything, and won't put anybody out. And in the morning we'll talk out what's to be done. Of course you've got to do something, just like me, for we're both broke."

"I haven't a cent in the world," Sandow, Junior, admitted, with ready candor.

As if to emphasize the fact, he thrust his right hand down into his trousers pocket.

Something papery touched his hand there.

He drew it out in a hurry, looking at it in surprise.

"What on earth is this?" he gasped.

"If you wasn't broke, I'd say it was a greenback!" smiled back Ned Bostwick, eagerly.

"Why, hang it, so it is! No, two of 'em!"

"And tenners, each!" gasped Ned.

"One apiece," said Tom, readily, pushing one of them at his new chum.

"Oh, come off now! I won't! Take it back!" protested Ned Bostwick.

"If you go back on our new friendship the first thing, in this way," flared Tom, "I'll—I'll lick you."

"But I didn't ask your friendship in order to get at your pile," exclaimed Ned, indignantly.

"And I didn't know I had one—honest! But, as I find that I have, we've got to start this friendship right. Now, which would you rather have—ten dollars or a licking?"

"I guess I'll take the money," uttered Ned, so soberly that our hero could not help laughing.

"Dr. Bradley must have slipped that in my pocket," gasped Tom.

"If he did he meant you to keep it. It's always a good plan not to go back on Doc!"

"Then I won't, but I'll hand this money back some day."

"There's home for us," cried Ned, suddenly, pointing across a small field.

It was a little rural place of the smallest kind.

There were perhaps two acres of ground, a five-room cottage and a small barn.

"The barn's mostly a bluff," Ned announced. "It's years since we kept a horse. But every summer I cut all the hay I can and put it in the barn until there's a chance to sell the stuff. And look at these gardens—all my work!"

"You're a hustler," exclaimed Tom, looking around on something like an acre of ground laid out carefully in well-tended crops.

"Oh, this ground does something like feed mother and me," the boy assented, with honest pride. "But—gee whizz!—I wish I could land a job, too. It's close scratching for us most of the time. But I won't worry you about those things," Tom. Here's the barn. Come in."

Into the little shack Ned Bostwick led his guest with the air of a host.

"We'll sleep here to-night, and to-morrow we'll plan to do something that will bring us some money," suggested Ned. "And now I know you're tired."

"So I am," Tom admitted, groping to a seat on a wheelbarrow near the door. "But I've got a good bit to do yet. I've got to write a letter and I've got to mail it. Thank goodness, I've got a pencil, a piece of paper and a stamp."

"Say," hinted Ned, easily, "can't I do a good thing by mailing it for you?"

"Why, if you would. I don't know that I want to be seen again in the village. And say, Ned, have you got any reason to be afraid of Jarrett?"

"Nothing," Ned replied, soberly, "except that this little place is mother's all except for a mortgage. Jarrett owns the mortgage."

"Then don't let anyone know we're friends—not just yet, Ned. If you meet me in town, at any time, just pass me by, and I'll understand."

"Of course," nodded Ned. "Now write your note."

This did not take our hero long. All he wrote was this:

"I happen to know that Jarrett is scheming to get you to sign a paper for a small amount of money. That paper will throw away every one of your rights to your invention. It's an old game with Jarrett. Unless you want to be a ruined man, don't sign a thing that you haven't first shown to a lawyer you can trust. I can't tell you who I am, but you'll understand that you can't go wrong by being dead careful."

This note, unsigned, our hero placed in the envelope and addressed it to John Bright.

Ned took it and was off like a flash. But Tom Preston was still awake when his new and much-needed friend returned.

Before they turned in on the hay that night Tom Preston had told Ned Bostwick much of what he knew of Jarrett's scheme to cheat John Bright out of the honest profits of his invention.

CHAPTER V.

EVERYBODY'S HERO.

"Hearing adjourned for two weeks."

That was the decision announced by Justice Gosling in the District Court that next morning.

For a bright young lawyer had appeared, at the request of Dr. Bradley.

That lawyer had requested an adjournment of the case for burglary against our hero.

The judge could not well refuse the prisoner a chance to prepare his defence.

Tom Preston walked out of the courtroom free for two weeks—unless he got into more trouble in the meantime.

Ned Bostwick was not there, but that youngster very soon had the news from Dr. Bradley.

"Now, what?" wondered our hero, as he turned off the side street into the main street.

His whole thought was how to get those all-important Thorvald papers—his one object in life these busy, eventful days.

The few people whom he passed looked at him with different eyes to-day.

Yesterday he had been almost a hero. To-day he stood

forth only as a boy who had been caught in an attempted theft.

"Look out!" rang a hoarse yell down the street.

As Tom turned the corner he saw people running in every direction.

"Look out! He's mad!"

Away down the street was a scurrying cloud of dust.

"Mad dog?" wondered Tom Preston, unbelievably.

"Can't be."

And it wasn't.

Out of the cloud of dust, head down and horns close to the ground, emerged a great brindled bull.

It was coming down the street at a mad gallop, its blood-shot eyes turned from side to side, as if seeking something that it could annihilate.

"Look out there, Chase!" screamed a frantic voice, as a farmer on his wagon drove around a nearby corner.

Swift as a flash the mad bull espied the horse and veered for it.

The man addressed as Chase didn't try to do anything but look out for himself.

Leaping from the seat, he vaulted the nearest fence, leaped up on the porch of a cottage, kicked his way through the window panes and vanished inside.

But the horse?

That panic-stricken animal, as if realizing its danger, and seeing no path of escape, reared, snorting and trembling.

Slash! Straight at the horse leaped the bull, its horns striking and sinking in.

Rip! That hapless horse was disemboweled quicker than one could speak two words.

Then, drawing back, the bull stamped, pawed, snorted, looking around with blood-red eyes for some other victim to its fury.

"That's the third horse the beast has gored!" wailed a voice from an upper window nearby. "Can't somebody do something?"

Bang! A rifle answered from another nearby house.

The bullet must have gone close, for its sharp hiss started the bull into motion.

Turning, it galloped down the street in the direction from which it had come.

Bang! Another rifle from another house.

A bellow from the bull answered, but whether the animal was hit or not, no one could see.

Certainly the shot did not stop its career.

As for the sidewalks, they were clear of people, save for Tom Preston.

He, after the first startled look, started down the street on a sprint.

"Boy, come in here for your life!" screamed a frightened woman from her doorway.

"In here, quick!" called another householder from safety. "When that critter turns, you'll be killed!"

But Tom darted on, his face white as chalk, but his mind made up.

"Boy! That bull'll get you!"

"I hope he does," floated back over Sandow, Junior's, shoulder. "That's what I'm after!"

Bang! Down the street somebody else had taken a shot at the mad, galloping animal.

But the bull must have borne a charmed life.

Bang! bang! Somebody had let go with both barrels of a shotgun.

Some of the charge must have struck the creature's flanks, for it came to a quick stop near a corner, pawing the ground and lashing its tail.

"Oh, oh, oh!" screamed Tom Preston, in mortal anguish.

For right around the nearest corner, click, click! on crutches, came a boy of fifteen.

All unconscious of the fearful danger, the cripple had rushed in where his life was worth hardly a guess.

With a terrific bellow, the bull wheeled—then straight at the cripple, who, halting, stood paralyzed with terror.

"Run, if you can!" screamed Sandow, Junior.

Our hero was now within a hundred yards of the bull.

But that was not time enough.

The maddened animal veered slightly at hearing that other voice from behind, yet struck glancingly at the cripple, knocking the poor unfortunate down.

Then, with a snort and a short bellow, the bull, barely pausing, veered to rush at our hero.

This was exactly what Tom Preston wanted.

This morning the homeless boy did not care whether he lived or died, but he wanted to save the cripple.

People screamed. Men with guns threw up the muzzles as they saw boy and bull rush at each other.

It looked as if the boy were as mad as the bull.

With its head low and horns out, the animal charged.

They came together.

Then, as the bull tossed up its head, the onlookers half-guessed the game of Sandow, Junior.

For, at the toss, Tom Preston flashed up into the air, holding to the animal's sharp horns.

Snort! The frenzied beast tried to shake off our hero's hold.

But Sandow, Junior, had muscles that were proof against that style of fight.

Two or three mad swings with its head. All to no avail!

Then the bull, having time to think, and becoming crafty, threw down its head.

Its wild plan was to get the boy where the hoofs could be used to kick and crush his life out.

But Tom landed on his feet, full of purpose.

Wrench! His muscles, even those over his temples, stood out like ropes of knotted steel in the supreme effort of strength that he made then and there.

There was a ripping sound, then a sharp break.

Onlookers gasped and rubbed their eyes.

For Sandow, Junior, by exerting every last ounce of his strength, had broken off short one of the bull's long horns.

Staggered by the pain, the bull fell back, its hot breath streaking the boy, its inflamed red eyes full of the anguish that racked the creature.

But Sandow, Junior, was not through.

Ere the bull could recover, our hero darted in under its frightened, raised head.

Thump! It was the hardest blow that Sandow, Junior, had ever struck with his pocket knife.

It landed squarely over the bull's heart.

A reel, a plunge and the animal was down, Tom Preston springing back a foot just in time to save himself from being crushed under that bulky body.

Thump! Another fearful blow over the beast's heart.

The bull was still, save for some twitchings of agony through its great frame.

"You can come out now, you people!" panted Sandow, Junior, rising.

His face was deathly white, yet wreathed in the smile of exultant triumph.

One man there was who had not waited for the invitation.

He came running up as fast as he could, swinging a repeating rifle as he ran.

"I think the bull's dead," announced Tom.

"I'll make sure of it!"

Half a dozen swift reports rang out, as many bullets piercing the brain of the beast that Preston had downed.

And now the people came thick and fast, pouring from every building nearby.

And cheer on cheer went up, but Tom hardly heard them.

His great heart had gone out to the cripple suffering on the sidewalk.

As the wild cheering throng rushed forward they were met by the sight of the boy who had just slain a bull now handling the cripple as tenderly as he could have done with the youngest infant.

"Not hurt much, old fellow, I hope," blurted Tom, as he bent over the hapless youngster.

"It's nothing much," returned the cripple, but his face was as white as Preston's own.

"I'll get you somewhere where you'll be better off," proposed Tom, lifting the youth gently.

To many in the crowd this sight was grander than the late awful tussle with the bull.

Among those hurrying forward was Elsie Bright.

As Tom passed her, bearing the injured cripple in his arms, he saw a look in Elsie's eyes that made him happier than anything else could have done.

"Hope she understands, now, that I'm something better than a doer of tricks," he thought, happily, the blood rushing to his face.

A wagon was being brought up.

Into this Tom lifted the cripple, who had been pouring forth thanks.

Two neighbors of the injured boy got in beside him.

"Hope you'll come along all right," said Tom, easily.

"And I guess you will."

"Thanks to you, I will," murmured the injured boy between his clenched teeth.

"Three cheers for the greatest boy that ever lived!" yelled one man, frantic with hero worship.

Again the cheers rang out.

As the wagon rolled away our hero would have ducked and darted off.

But there was no show for that.

Blissville had discovered its hero, and meant to make the most of him.

Up! On the shoulders of two of the biggest men in the crowd Tom was paraded up and down past the bull.

No one remembered that the boy had been despised a quarter of an hour before.

In the temper of the crowd just then any jury that had believed in Jarrett's burglary charge would have been lynched on the spot.

But at last Tom was allowed to slide down to his feet.

Someone tried to start a subscription by passing the hat.

It would have been a large collection, too, but our hero proudly, promptly put a stop to it.

Then the crowd surged back to where the bull lay.

Not unwillingly, Preston was dragged to the bull and made to explain how he had struck the blow that had settled the creature's fate.

The torn-off horn was already missing. Some agile relic-hunter had had the presence of mind to bear that off to hiding.

"Young man, I hope you'll come and stop with me a while," urged one smiling woman in the crowd.

Tom gently declined, but, while he was speaking, a score more of similar invitations were hurled at him.

It was great—being everybody's hero!

But Tom, at the first chance, slipped away from these pressing people.

Now or never, he felt, would be the chance for one right word with scornful Elsie Bright.

She saw him coming, saw his eyes on her, and guessed that he meant to speak to her.

She flushed quickly, but our hero ascribed that to bashfulness before the crowd.

"Miss Bright," he asked, in a very low, humble tone, "may I come to-night to see you and your father?"

"Why?" asked Elsie, looking down at the sidewalk.

"I feel—that—that I ought to know you both," he stammered.

"You seem to forget," remarked Elsie, with a little quiver of her lip, "that we don't know you, or anything about you."

"You—you mean you don't want to know me?" gasped Preston, all heart going from him in a twinkling.

"Why, of course papa and I are not in a hurry to know people whom nobody else knows," replied Elsie, still not looking at him.

Her voice, too, was quivering now, as if she hated to say such a thing to the youth who, at this moment, was the hero of almost everyone else in town.

Then, to cut the scene short, Elsie, with a toss of her head, turned and walked briskly away.

Those who had witnessed the scene stared in amazement.

"Oh, of course!" gulped heart-sick Sandow, Junior.

"What a fool I was. Why should any nice girl like her want to know me? Why, I am an unknown. And, worse than that—a dozen times worse—I'm accused of burglary and only out on bail. What a fool I've been!"

Right then and there he formed the firm resolve never even to attempt again to speak to Elsie Bright.

But the jar hurt just the same. It spoiled all the pleasure he might have found in the praise of the crowd.

It was another hour ere that crowd got tired of talking of the great scene before it would hear of letting Tom Preston go.

And, when he did go, there seemed to be nothing to do except to walk disconsolately up the main street, his hands in his pockets.

But he got away from what was left of the crowd, and that was worth something.

"Say," whispered a voice close at hand, "don't turn, but listen. I'm Ned Bostwick. What do you think? Jarrett has just given me a quarter to take a note to old Bright."

"Don't take it, then," whispered Tom, on the impulse of the moment. "Slip down the side street and out into the fields, and I'll follow at a distance."

"Follow, then!"

Five minutes later the two boys crouched in a clump of bushes, secure from observation.

"A letter from Jarrett to Bright, you say?" quivered our hero. "Let me see it."

"What are you going to do with it?" asked Ned, wonderingly, as he saw Tom trying the sealed flap.

"Going to open it," our hero replied, unconcernedly.

"Whew! You don't dare do that with a letter, do you?"

"Why not? There's no stamp on it. It ain't a United States letter."

As he spoke, our hero, prying with the blade of his pen-knife, got the sealed flap up.

"Oh, that infernal scoundrel!" he gritted.

"What's wrong?" asked wondering Ned.

"Everything. Listen to this!"

And Tom Preston read aloud:

"Dear Mr. Bright: You have been at me for some time to get some more money in that business of ours. I am leaving town this afternoon, and may be away for some time to come. If you will come to my office this afternoon I shall be prepared to make you a liberal cash arrangement."

"That's Jarrett's bait to get the old man anxious and going to his office on the run," burst, indignantly, from

the boy. "Jarrett will make believe to be in a dreadful hurry, shove some money at the old man, ask him to sign a paper in a rush—and then, some day, Mr. Bright will wake up to the fact that he has sold all his rights for a song. Oh, it's wicked—fierce!"

"What are you going to do?" asked wondering Ned.

"Slip a note of my own in with this."

Taking out paper and pencil, our hero wrote:

"The same friend who warned you last night calls your attention to this note from Jarrett. The coil for your ruin is tightening around you. Do not go near Jarrett until you have advised with a lawyer you can trust!"

This second note our hero folded in with Jarrett's.

"Now, take this to John Bright," requested our hero, coolly.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN A THIEF GOES FISHING—WHAT?

Tom Preston suddenly craned his neck.

It was fifteen minutes later.

Since Ned had left him he had not stirred from that spot in the woods.

But now, peering out as he heard steps, he saw someone in whom he was interested.

"Jarrett—and going fishing?" he murmured, rubbing his eyes as if he did not believe what they told him.

Yes; Richard Jarrett, judging from all the appearances of things, was bound to go fishing.

At his left side was slung a bait basket.

Over his right shoulder he carried a pole with a reel.

"When a thief goes fishing—then what?" murmured the boy, sarcastically.

It certainly seemed all out of reason for this very rich, very busy and very wicked fellow, whose conscience must be like a rotten sponge, to think of enjoying a day at the wholly gentle art of fishing.

"If he's fishing, then it ain't for fish!" glowed the boy, indignantly. "Most men go fishing because they haven't anything else to do. As I haven't anything else to do, I'll trail along, too, and keep an eye out. But that scoundrel, Jarrett, is always too busy for fishing unless there's more than that to the game!"

By this time Jarrett was so well down the road that Tom began to follow.

Yet our hero did not attempt to go by the road, but contented himself with keeping somewhat in sight behind bushes and trees.

Jarrett's walk continued for at least a half mile down the road.

Here, at the bank of a little river, the rich schemer and dealer in "skin games" turned aside from the road.

For at least an eighth of a mile Jarrett followed the bank of the stream until he came to a shaded, lonely bit by the bank.

Leisurely enough the fellow settled himself, slowly baiting a line and casting the hook in.

It was a wild bit of jungle, with bushes all about.

While Jarrett was lighting a cigar, and otherwise providing for lazy comfort, Tom managed to get nearer, a foot at a time.

"This place is about right," sighed the boy at last.

The "place" was in a clump of bushes near the bank.

Tom's right hand, as he lay crouched there, hugging the ground close, was within eight feet of Jarrett's broad back.

"This is a snug enough little place, too," murmured the boy, with a satisfied sigh. "Jarrett will never find me here unless he comes tramping through the bushes. What if he does find me? He knows, from past experience, that he has more to fear than I. Whew!"

This last exclamation was brought forth by the sight of a revolver which Jarrett drew from his pocket, looked at and then put away again.

"Mine enemy doesn't intend to risk my muscles again!" grimaced the boy.

As the time slipped on, however, Sandow, Junior, began to feel decidedly bored.

Jarrett hadn't come there to fish. That much was wholly certain, for presently the fellow sat with one leg resting on the butt of his pole, and drew out a newspaper to read.

This took up much time.

Then at last that basket was unpacked. Jarrett laid out a generous lunch.

It made Sandow, Junior, always blessed with a good appetite, ravenously hungry to lie there and watch in silence, but he had to do it.

Then finally our hero roused with a start.

"Gracious! I've been asleep," he trembled.

Yes; he certainly had been, for the afternoon sun was now much lower than when he remembered last having noted its position.

"Oh, it's a mighty lucky thing, then, I didn't snore!" throbbed the boy.

Jarrett still sat there, in the same place, so close by.

But other steps were coming near now, past the bushes down the bank.

"It was someone else coming that woke me," mused our hero.

A low whistle. Jarrett, turning his head, answered.

"Oh, it's you, Carbury, is it?" asked Jarrett, as the thin, crafty face of the lawyer appeared.

"It's me," assented Lawyer Carbury.

"Well, how goes the game?"

"Why, er—er—that's what's bothering me a bit, Mr. Jarrett," confessed the man of law.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, Mr. Bright——"

"Is he stubborn?"

"Why, not exactly. He——"

"Suspicious of us?" broke in Jarrett, impatiently.

"No, sir. That is, he may be. The truth is——"

"Well, what?"

"Mr. Jarrett, you'll be greatly surprised, I know, but Mr. Bright hasn't answered your urgent note."

"Bully for John Bright, then!" throbbed eavesdropping young Sandow, Junior.

"What's the matter with him?" demanded Jarrett, irritably. "Is the old fool out of town? Didn't he get my note?"

"Why, that boy you sent it with——"

"Bostwick?"

"Yes, sir. I saw Bostwick, who said he had delivered the note to Mr. Bright in person."

"Then the old fool must have got it?"

"Of course."

"And hasn't answered?"

"Not a line or a sight of him, sir. So I thought I'd better hurry to you."

"I'm glad you did," Jarrett nodded. "I thought he'd rush to my office on the jump, the old fool has been so eager for the sight of more money. Then, when he didn't find me in, and had to wait I thought his impatience would get such a strong hold on him that he would be ready to sign anything when I did show up. That's generally the way with men who are in a hurry for cash. Instead of that——"

"Instead, Mr. Jarrett, Bright has got you on the anxious seat."

"It looks like it," admitted Jarrett. "But sit down here beside me, and we'll try to think it out."

"I'm glad I'm here," quoth Sandow, Junior, to himself.

"Carbury," went on the rich schemer, "in some way we've got to bring Bright to book soon. Those machine people are after me to come to a settlement on that invention. If they can't deal with me soon, they will look up Bright himself. Then there'd be a deuce of a time settling with him, and I'd lose, easily, a good hundred thousand dollars that I expect to get out of this."

"But what can we do?" asked the lawyer, uneasily.

"I've got to get Bright to book to-night—no matter at what trouble. This paper he signed for the first money, while binding on him to some degree, doesn't satisfy me. It would hinder Bright from making another deal, but it doesn't protect me as much as I'd like to have it do."

"You've brought the paper with you?" gasped the lawyer, as Jarrett took a document from one of his pockets. "That was very risky, sir."

"Why?"

"Why, you might lose it, sir, or it might be stolen. Someone might even take it from you by force."

"Carbury," said Richard Jarrett, with sullen emphasis, "if anyone even tries to get between Bright and myself in this deal, then I'll simply and promptly hire someone to kill the meddler!"

With that, the dealer in "skin games" rested the paper on the ground between the lawyer and himself.

And Tom Preston, moving an inch at a time, tried to

steal forward to sneak that paper away, while Jarrett explored his pockets for other papers.

A minute later Sandow, Junior, with an exultant thrill, closed his fingers around that precious paper and pulled it slowly back into the bushes.

Yet, in moving stealthily, he made some slight sound.

Slight as it was, though, it was enough to bring both men instantly up to their feet.

"Something moving in the bushes right there," announced Carbury, pointing to the very leaves that screened our hero.

"I thought I heard something," replied Jarrett, drawing his pistol and cocking it.

CHAPTER VII.

ELSIE PUTS JARRETT ON THE TRACK

"Be careful how you handle that pistol!"

It was Lawyer Carbury's alarmed cry, as the legal man drew back in fright.

Jarrett laughed roughly.

"You old scare-cat!"

"I'd rather be scared than shot!"

"Keep quiet, so we can listen!"

Then, as silence came, Tom Preston lay with fearfully beating heart.

Jarrett was the kind of a man to kill under these circumstances.

But it was not of that that our hero thought.

His fingers tightly clutched the paper that bound Bright to this dastard.

If he could only get away with that, or even destroy it, Sandow, Junior, was willing enough to die.

"That noise sounded further away, I think," declared Jarrett. "Come along with me."

A little below they went tramping through the brush, then back to the starting point.

But their first short excursion had been enough for our hero.

Profiting by the noise that their feet were making, he had stolen through the bushes, further and further from the river.

And now he heard Jarrett's startled cry:

"Carbury, that paper is gone! I forgot it!"

"The paper?" shrieked the horrified lawyer

"Gone!"

"You bet it's gone!" clicked Tom Preston, as he scurried softly through the shielding bushes. "Gone! And I'd eat it whole before ever I'd let you get it again."

The two men were coming through the bushes now, traveling fast.

But Tom, profiting by the great noise they made, veered off diagonally, and soon was beyond the danger of pursuit.

But he did not stop traveling at a good gait until he

once more found himself on one of the streets of Blissville.

Up on Main street almost the first person he saw was Ned Bostwick.

That energetic youth was standing before a store window looking in.

"Ned," whispered Tom, as he brushed past, "clutch this paper. Hide it."

Sadow, Junior, felt the paper gripped as he passed his chum.

Then our hero, halting, turned to look in at another store window.

Whistling, strolling slowly, but without looking at Preston, Bostwick passed by.

"Get that paper safe home. Hide it in the barn, under the hay!" Tom whispered, softly.

"O. K."

Ned passed on.

The whole thing had been slickly done.

No one looking on from a distance of a few feet would have had any idea that the boys had communicated.

"That Bostwick's a brick, and no mistake!" glowed our hero as, looking down the street a minute later, he saw Ned just getting into good motion for home.

"Now, I guess I'll have some news for Mr. Bright and Elsie," thought the boy.

The impulse to call upon them was too strong to be resisted.

Elsie's past scornfulness would have made no difference under any circumstances.

Except with those who had done him mortal injury, Sadow, Junior, was one of the most forgiving boys alive.

"I've got to do something to change her notion of me, anyway," he mused. "Her father, by proving how I've helped him, can change that notion far quicker than anyone else."

The little cottage in which Elsie and her father lived was not hard to find.

Tom had already located it the day before.

Now, he went straight to the house, as if to an old haunt.

His heart beat swiftly as he passed in at the gate.

That same heart, when he pulled at the bell, seemed to make more noise than the bell itself.

Just for a second the impulse came strongly to bolt, after all.

The boy who braved a mad bull was afraid of a gentle girl!

But the door swung open.

Then there was a startled, puzzled cry:

"You!"

There was nothing of welcome in that one word, so swiftly spoken.

Quite to the contrary, it was plain that Elsie Bright, who stood before him, radiantly pure and sweet in her soft white frock, was wholly displeased.

"I—I didn't expect to see you—here," she stammered,

reddening a bit in spite of her effort to keep her self control.

"I—I came to see your father," stammered the boy, his own face chalk-white with the humiliation of his reception.

"My father is not at home," Elsie announced, curtly.

"Not at home?"

Tom fairly gasped the words, as if troubled with shortness of breath.

For the fear had assailed him that John Bright, if away, must be at Jarrett's office, eagerly awaiting the payment of money that was to all but ruin him.

"I don't suppose I need to tell you where my father is?" asked Elsie, almost sneeringly.

She regarded with cold displeasure the boy who still insisted on standing there at her door.

"Oh, yes, yes, please!" Tom implored. "It's more important than you can have any idea of, Miss Bright."

"What is?"

"That I should know where your father is."

"Why, how can that possibly interest you?"

"I'll tell you if you'll let me come in," proposed the abashed boy, eagerly.

Elsie hesitated, reddening still more.

Then, curtly:

"Come in, then."

She admitted him, closed the door behind him, ushered him into one of the prettiest little parlors imaginable, then added:

"Pardon me a minute until I get the maid."

She was gone, Tom standing awkwardly in the middle of this dainty little parlor.

But the meaning of her words rushed over him.

"That's tough enough!" he gasped. "I'm such a shady character that she won't even let me talk to her in her home except there's a servant present! Oh, Miss Elsie, what a different tune you may hum some day, if you ever know how hard I've schemed to save you and your father from ruin!"

Then, the minutes dragged.

What on earth could be keeping Elsie?

Had she changed her mind, and did she intend refusing altogether to see him.

"But in that case she'd at least send me word by the servant—she'd be so glad to get such an outcast out of the house," Tom uttered, bitterly.

Jingle! A ring at the bell.

"That may be Mr. Bright coming home!" throbbed the boy.

Almost instantly the front door opened.

"Good afternoon, Miss Elsie."

That voice made Tom, Preston almost feel faint, for the speaker was Richard Jarrett.

"Come in," said the girl, simply. "Step into the parlor."

Then between the portieres stepped the mortal enemy of Sadow, Junior.

"You!" gulped Jarrett, stopping short.

"Yes," retorted Tom, in cool contempt. "Come in. I won't hurt you."

Stung by the tone, Jarrett stepped further into the room, Elsie coming in after him.

"I came, Miss Elsie," began Jarrett, "to inquire where your father is."

"Then John Bright isn't at Jarrett's office—thank heaven for that!" throbbed the boy, feeling warm and almost happy once more.

"I do not know where my father is," Elsie replied, coolly. "He is out of town, though, I believe."

"Out of town?" echoed Jarrett, in surprise.

"Yes. I—I don't know whether I ought to tell you——"

"What?" broke in Jarrett, eagerly.

"Why, my father went away right after receiving a note from you?"

"He went, then, to leave town, you mean?" asked the big man, his jaw dropping visibly.

"Yes. And, after he had gone, I ran across your note in papa's room. There was another note with it. It seems all very strange. I—I don't know whether I am doing right to show it to you."

"Yes, yes. Let me see it."

Tom Preston felt wholly powerless to prevent, as Elsie passed Jarrett's note and his own to that rich schemer.

"What's this other note? Advising your father to see a lawyer before he goes near me?" gasped Jarrett.

Then, swiftly, he turned upon our hero, with blazing eyes.

"Preston, this is your work, you most infamous of un-hung young scoundrels! Miss Elsie, if any harm comes to your father, blame this impudent young meddler!"

Crumbling the two notes in his hand, Richard Jarrett stamped angrily out of the parlor, slamming the front door after him next.

"Did you write that other note to my father?" challenged Elsie, looking straight into our hero's eyes.

"Yes."

"Then, indeed, I shall blame you if anything happens to poor papa. You are responsible for his disappearance, for now I am certain that he has disappeared. Oh, how I have grown to hate and loathe the sight of you!"

Tom stood chained to the spot, crushed. It was as if the end of the world had come. The end of his world had come!

"Leave this house!" commanded Elsie, pointing to the door. "No! Don't try to speak to me—or I shall scream for the police. Go!"

Blind and dumb, Tom Preston staggered out to the street.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CRAWLER IN THE DARK.

"Do you suppose Jarrett has made all of his money by the same kind of crooked games?" asked Ned Bostwick.

"I don't believe it would be possible for him to make any money by honest means," retorted Tom, bitterly.

It was the evening of the same day, and the two boys were lying off on the hay in the barn.

They were resting, not attempting to sleep, for the evening was still very young.

But the barn was loose-boarded and drafty, and, with some breeze drifting through, it was a very comfortable place to lie at ease and chat.

"How does Jarrett work the game, if I'm not asking too many questions for an outsider?" queried Tom.

"Why, he passes in this town for a promoter, doesn't he?"

"That's the word, I believe," Ned answered, slowly.

"But he also holds a lot of mortgages in this village."

"That's because he wants to have as big a hold as he can over everyone!" gritted Preston.

"He certainly got a hold on us!" sighed Ned. "Mother'll lose this poor, measly little home of a place, if he crowds her next interest day."

"That's his game—to keep everyone around him under his thumb!"

"But how does Jarrett play the big game?" insisted Ned.

"Well, you see, old chap, the fellow is known as a very rich man and a promoter of inventions. So green inventors flock to him. When an inventor has anything that really is good, Jarrett goes into it. But not on the square. He advances the inventor a little money, and gets some papers signed. Then, by and by, a bit more money, and some more papers signed. The papers are so cleverly drawn up by that scoundrel, Carbury, that the poor inventor doesn't understand what he is really signing. But the day comes when the inventor discovers that he has signed away all his rights to Jarrett, and that there's no more money coming."

"Is that what is happening to Mr. Bright?"

"Yes," replied Tom, spitting a straw out vengefully. "And that's the game I'm trying to spoil. Jarrett paid Mr. Bright three thousand dollars the first time, and led the poor man to expect that a lot more of money would be coming. So, of course, the old man has been spending his money freely. Already he is where he wants more money. So now Jarrett is after Bright to sign another paper. That'll be the last one. By the time Mr. Bright has spent the next money that's coming he'll discover that he no longer has any interest in his own invention and that Jarrett owns it outright."

"Do you suppose Jarrett has played that game often?" Ned demanded, indignantly.

"As often as he's had a chance. You can be sure of that!"

"But you didn't come to town on Bright's account, did you?" asked Ned, curiously.

"I never heard of Bright until I reached Blissville."

"Oh!"

Ned was silent for so long that, presently, Tom went on:

"I may as well tell you, Ned, for I'm satisfied that you'll hold your peace."

"You can be sure of that!" Ned uttered, softly.

"The story isn't a long one. Three years after my father's death my mother married the second time. She married a good-natured, big-hearted, easy-going Swede. He was a finely educated fellow, but a dreamer, without any hustle or any knowledge of business. Yet one day a fine idea for an invention came to him.

"You know, Ned, that a boiler is pretty sure to blow up if most of the water runs out while there's a fire beneath it. They put on a water-gauge, which tells the engineer how much water is left in the boiler."

"I know," nodded Ned.

"There's another scheme on an engine known as the safety valve. That is so set that the force of the steam opens the valve when the steam pressure is getting high enough to make some danger of the boiler bursting.

"Now, both those schemes are good with a careful engineer. But some engineers are careless and a boiler explosion, or, at least, some damage to the boiler, often happens, just because the fellow in charge of the engine doesn't watch his water-gauge and his steam pressure.

"My stepfather, Thorvald, got to thinking that over. One day he thought out a vacuum scheme that could be fitted to either a gauge or a safety-valve. When the water got too low, or the steam pressure too high, this invention started a bell to ringing, and that bell went on ringing until the engineer came and set matters straight. Of course the invention could be so arranged that a second bell would ring in the office of the manager or superintendent of a big mill. That gave the boss a chance to know just how well his engineer was looking after things."

"Say, that invention was all to the brainy—sure!" cried Bostwick, admiringly. "Did it work?"

"It never got a chance to," Tom rejoined, gloomily.

"Thorvald couldn't get a patent on it?"

"Guess again, Ned. He got his invention patented in a rush. But then Thorvald had the bad luck to run into Jarrett as a promoter. Jarrett—well, he worked the same game on Thorvald that he's playing now on Mr. Bright."

"And Thorvald sold out?"

"Yes; though he was lied to, and didn't understand it that way."

"And Jarrett has made money out of the scheme?"

"He expects to. From what I can hear, he's just about to put through the deal with a great engine manufacturing concern."

"So you came down on the jump to see Jarrett, eh?"

"I started to hoof it from town to town to try to find Jarrett. For poor Thorvald is dead, and he gave us only a hazy idea of where Jarrett lived. But I found the big scoundrel here!"

"And now?" asked Ned, quickly.

"Ned, old fellow, that villain has all the Thorvald papers in his office safe. Oh, if I could only get them and destroy them. Then I could snap my fingers at Jarrett and my mother would soon have all the big money that she's entitled to."

"Where is your mother now?"

"I wish with all my heart I knew," gulped Tom, choking hard. "We got separated in New York, and I haven't been able to find her since. But, with money enough to advertise, I'd mighty soon find her."

"But those Thorvald papers?"

"Ned, I've simply got to find some way to get them in my possession. I'm growing so desperate that I don't care much what I have to do in order to get them. I'm simply determined that, somehow, I'll do the trick. I may get the Thorvald papers as easily as I did the Bright paper to-day. By the way, old fellow, that paper is safe, isn't it?"

"You bet it is," Ned returned, with emphasis.

Just then Tom Preston sat up quickly on the hay.

"What's the——"

"Hush!"

Another twinkling, and then Tom was on his feet.

He stole toward the door, Ned following softly in his wake.

Just around the corner of the barn our hero was in time to see a figure vanish into the shadows.

Swift as a flash our hero gripped Ned detainingly.

"Pshaw!" laughed our hero, "I thought I heard somebody moving around. I'm a dreamer—that's what."

Still he kept that steel-like grip on Ned Bostwick, who had the good sense to understand and stand where he was.

But after a few moments Tom turned to his chum, his eyes blazing.

"Ned," he whispered low, "there was someone prowling. I saw him scoot off in the darkness. You know what that means!"

"Jarrett!"

"Some dirty-work tool of his spying around. You see, Ned, Jarrett has begun to have me watched, and so he has learned that I'm spending my nights here with you."

"Gee-whizz!" cried Ned, looking mightily solemn. "Then Jarrett will soon wind up that mortgage on this little place of mother's."

"Oh, I hope not, old fellow!" gulped Tom, miserably. "We'll try to give him something bigger to think about. But I mustn't waste any time here. I've got to hustle after that spy. I'll circle around the road swiftly, and catch the spy lower down on the highway. Then I can shadow him and learn just what's up. Ned, old fellow, wait for me here—never mind if I'm gone for hours!"

Ned was still awake, two hours later, when Tom stole softly in.

"Did you catch the spy?" Bostwick demanded, breathlessly.

"I located him on the road and shadowed him to town."

"Learn anything worth knowing?"

"Far more than I want to believe!" gulped Sandow, Junior, stifling the desire to groan. "Ned, I got close enough to hear the spy report to Jarrett."

"And then——"

"And now the jig's up for me!" proclaimed Tom Preston, miserably. "Jarrett has taken the scare right home. He won't lose the Thorvald papers now. He has four armed men in his office to guard that safe all night long. In the morning armed men will escort those papers in safety to some big bank vault. Oh, Ned, Ned! My last chance for justice is gone!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE BOY WHO'D RATHER DIE.

Nothing ever wholly kills youthful appetite.

But the boys, after having finished, the next morning early, a fairly good meal that had been bought out of their little windfall capital, looked glumly at each other.

"What's the programme this morning?" asked Ned, at last.

"I don't see anything to do, unless it's a heap of thinking," Tom replied.

"That doesn't sound very active."

"Doesn't it, though? That's because, Ned, you don't understand my way of doing my best thinking. I've always been used to exercise, ever since I can remember."

"You must, to have the muscle you've got. Tom, do you know you're a wonder?"

"That was what my father tried to train me for," smiled our hero.

"He succeeded, by thunder. You're Sandow, Junior, and no mistake. But why——"

Ned stopped, a bit embarrassed.

"With all my strength why ain't I bigger, do you mean?"

"That's it."

"Why, it's rather a queer case," Tom smiled. "You see, as a baby I was so undersized that none thought I would live long. Very likely I wouldn't, if my father hadn't started with my bodily training so early. He had a notion that he could make me as tall and big as other folks. He didn't quite succeed, but he gave me the start for a pretty fair muscle. Although I'm smaller than the average——"

"You look really puny until you get busy with your muscle," Ned broke in.

"Yet, with all my small size, I suppose I can say, without bragging, that I am as strong a boy of my age as there is living."

"The strongest."

"Whatever strength I've got came out of exercise. So, when I want to think, I get out on a good long track and

walk, walk, walk until I've covered miles. By that time I've thought everything out the best that's in me. So this morning I'm going to take a tramp up over that big hill yonder."

"We call it a mountain around here," bragged Ned, with local pride.

"Want to go over the mountain with me?" our hero invited.

"If you won't tramp the life out of me I'd be glad to go. And I've got one treasure that you haven't seen. Wait a second!"

Darting out of the barn and into the house, Bostwick was quickly back with a very fair-looking telescope.

"It's not a bad instrument," Ned declared, with pride. "We'll take that up, and you'll see a good deal of the country with it."

"Lead on, then. You know the road better than I do."

It was a brisk two-mile tramp to the foot of the mountain that Tom had chosen for scaling.

It was one of a range of low mountains or tall hills that passed Blissville at the west.

A fairly good driving road led up over the mountain.

"This road is used quite a bit," Ned explained. "It happens to be the only road between Blissville and Acton."

"What's Acton?" asked Tom.

"Oh, a fairly live little town, the county seat."

"I'll know more later about Acton, then, I suppose," cried Tom, glumly. "That's where I'll get my real trial on the burglary charge."

"Forget that," cried Ned, ruefully.

"Wish with all my heart I could."

"You're blue this morning, aren't you, old fellow?"

"Blue as indigo! And maybe you'd be, Ned, if you saw all your plans for fortune crumbling, and yourself headed on a cinch for State prison. It's enough to put a blue streak in a fellow's life, even on a grand summer day like this."

"Things may look different before the day's over," Ned Bostwick urged, but only half-hopefully.

"Things will stand a lot of improvement with me," smiled Tom, wearily.

"Let's stop here a bit, and use the telescope," Ned suggested.

It was more to get his chum's mind off his troubles than for any other purpose that Ned drew out the telescope.

"See how near it brings Blissville to us," he suggested, after focussing the tube.

"It does," nodded Sandow, Junior, after a look. "Blissville! What a mockery of a name for a place where a fellow like Jarrett rules everybody! It has been anything but Blissville for me since I first saw the town."

"Oh, Jarrett doesn't rule everybody there," grimaced Ned. "Dr. Bradley, for instance."

"That's one shining example," sighed Tom. "There aren't many of them over in Blissville."

Then, without purpose, Tom swung the telescope around to the road from Acton.

"Great Scott!" he suddenly muttered. "Why, it must be!"

"What?"

"See that buggy coming?"

At the distance of a mile the horse and vehicle seemed to the naked eye to be a crawling dot on the road.

But Tom, with the telescope, had recognized the occupants of the buggy.

"Who? What?" demanded Ned, watching his friend's animated face.

"Elsie Bright and her father!"

"Why, she was in town yesterday afternoon, wasn't she?"

"Yes, but that's Elsie, unless she's twins. She must have got word to join her father last night. That's they who are coming, as sure as guns!"

"Then Bright must have been over to Acton to see a lawyer," hinted Ned, curiously.

"I hope he saw a good one."

Tom remained with the telescope at his eyes for some moments.

"You going to stay here and speak to them?" Ned queried.

"What's the use?" gulped Tom. "Elsie won't even look at me. She despises me—told me so."

"Do girls always mean all they say?"

"That one does!" Tom retorted, gloomily. "Why, from the very start, she seemed to think I was some queer new kind of dirt!"

"Then she hasn't brains enough to know an apple from a potato!" retorted Ned, with spirit, but a swift look from his chum prevented him from saying more.

"It would be worse than foolish to be here in the road while they're passing," went on Tom, dispiritedly. "Let's get up the slope there, where we won't be seen."

"All right, if you say so," assented Ned, in a tone which conveyed his own impression that his chum was foolish.

Twenty feet up the slope from the road was a clump of bushes behind which the boys found a screen.

"Now my chump friend is settling himself down for the luxury of a peep at a girl who won't look at him without contempt!" uttered Ned, wrathily, to himself. "What fools some girls can be!"

Ned was still standing, with the telescope in his hand.

Just as a matter of idle curiosity he turned the tube toward Blissville.

"Say," he suddenly ejaculated, "here comes a buggy from the other direction—and it carries Jarrett and Carbury."

"What's that?" throbbed Tom, jumping up to his feet.

He took the telescope eagerly, scanning the road from Blissville.

"That's the puff-adders, sure enough!" he cried, grinding his teeth. "Say, Ned, the nearest big bank is over at Acton, ain't it?"

"Why, yes."

"That's where they are bound then, to lock the Thorvald papers up in a vault that is proof against the ordinary safe-cracker. That's the kind of a fellow they think I am."

"Coming over this road with the papers you'd give your life to get!" quavered Ned. "Whew! But that's a tremendous circumstance!"

"It's more than that—it's a temptation!" pronounced Tom, grimly.

"What do you mean?" demanded Ned, surveying his friend with startled eyes. "Oh, no—not that!"

"I am fearfully tempted to hold them up—push the horse and buggy over that cliff below us—or almost anything to get the Thorvald papers. It's a fearful temptation when I think of what the Jarrett buggy contains."

"Don't!" shuddered Ned.

"I'm not going to," Tom retorted, grimly. "Thank goodness I'm proof against such temptations."

Ned sighed, then looked at his chum with new admiration for his strength that was not merely of muscle.

"What are you going to do, then?" Ned asked, while Tom continued to use the telescope, first on the Jarrett buggy, and then on that which contained Elsie and her father.

"Can't do much," Tom sighed. "But see here, Ned, I wish I could guess the point along this road at which those two buggies would meet. It seems to me it will be nearer Acton. Tell you what you do, old fellow; you run up the road a bit—say an eighth of a mile—and hide close to the road. I'll stay here. Then one of us will be close enough, I hope, when the two buggies meet, to hear what Jarrett and Bright say."

"But," hesitated Ned, "you won't——"

"No," smiled Sandow, Junior, "I won't do anything unlawful, or even unmanly."

Satisfied, Bostwick bounded away.

Sandow, Junior, settled down behind his clump of bushes to watch.

Both buggies were now within half a mile of the place, the animals coming on at easy jogs over the rough road.

"It'd be so easy to push Jarrett and Carbury over that cliff!" muttered the boy, uncannily.

The road just beneath him was perhaps fourteen feet wide. Its further edge was the beginning of a steep cliff that slanted down for some three hundred feet below.

"It'll be so easy, too!" murmured the boy. "But, pshaw! I'm not a murderer! My mother didn't rear me for that!"

He smiled bitterly, then suddenly raised his head.

"What's that?" he wondered.

For now, from the direction of Acton, came the sounds of flying hoofs. In another second the meaning of it all dawned on the boy. He jumped up, his face as white as death.

"Bright's horse running away—and on this treacherous road!" he gasped. "Oh, Elsie!"

"I can stop that horse, perhaps, if I keep cool," he gasped, gripping his hands tight. "But I must keep out of sight until the horse is right here, or I might scare it worse."

Seconds counted now, for he heard the frightened animal come tearing on.

So he crouched, ready for the sudden, flying appearance that he planned.

The horse, bearing Elsie and her father behind, came tearing into sight around the bend.

"Merciful heaven!"

For, while our hero still crouched in hiding, the animal reared, slewed the buggy and pitched John Bright out into the roadway.

Then—veer! Uncontrollably frightened, the horse turned to back over the cliff, with Elsie fainting in the buggy.

Leap! Tom was under way like a flash—down into the road in a twinkling.

It was a feat for a giant, or one tired of life!

"As well die now as to-morrow!" vented friendless, heart-sick young Sandow.

He seized the bridle, stiffened his tense muscles and prayed—for scornful Elsie, not himself!

A thousand chances to one that the toppling rig would drag even Sandow, Junior, over the brink of destruction!

CHAPTER X.

THE DOUBLE RUNAWAY.

"Hold on, Tom!" bellowed old Mr. Bright.

There was frantic appeal in the man's voice, as he tried to raise himself to his feet and go to the rescue.

But he found that he could hardly stand.

Sandow, Junior, was having the great fight of his life—a losing fight, too, beyond a doubt.

Rat-a-tat-tat! Another horse was coming, from the opposite direction.

Jarrett, driving at a brisk speed now, had just stung his animal with the whip.

It snorted, bounded, and then came in sight of the strange, awful struggle at the cliff's edge.

Frightened in an instant by the scene, Jarrett's horse took the bit in its teeth and leaped forward. A second runaway now!

Jarrett, white and scared, just guided his horse safely by old John Bright, who had crept tremblingly against the slope.

Then on and out of view went Jarrett and Carbury—whether to death or not it mattered little to those left behind.

For Tom Preston, groaning, sweating, straining, was near the point of giving up the fight.

The buggy was well over the cliff, the horse's hind feet were gradually slipping over it.

Nor did the horse, frightened rather than encouraged by the strong young hand at the bridle, aid any.

"Do all you can, Tom! I can hardly move!" sobbed the injured old man.

Young Sandow did not answer, but the knots stood out harder than ever on his neck and forehead and on his straining young arms. His back seemed breaking.

Then all his last remaining strength he threw in, with a prayer.

Just a bit the horse came forward, and Tom, falling back, threw his tensed strength in again.

A good, hard, powerful yank—a dying effort, it seemed to the straining young Sandow—and now he drew the snorting, wild-eyed horse to sure footing on the roadway.

In another twinkling our hero had forced the animal to draw the buggy up to momentary safety.

But the horse, though well gripped, was still snorting and plunging.

Not for even a second could Tom let go of the bridle to snatch Elsie from her peril.

"Can't you lift Elsie out while I hold this brute?" appealed the white-faced boy, hoarsely.

"I'll try," half-sobbed John Bright, as he half-limped, half-crawled toward the buggy.

But just at that moment Elsie opened her eyes flutteringly.

"Elsie!" appealed the boy, desperately. "Elsie, jump!"

She opened her eyes wider. Then, taking in the meaning of the view around her, she slowly, totteringly got down from the buggy.

"Get back out of the way—both of you!" begged the boy. "Elsie, help your father. He has been hurt."

That roused the girl as nothing else would have done.

Tom, as soon as he felt certain they were safe, devoted all his energies to quieting the horse.

Nor was this difficult, now that our hero was able to devote all his energies to that one task.

Within a minute he led the animal to a stout young tree at the inner side of the roadway. Here he hitched the brute with one of the reins, next he found a halter under the buggy seat, and made the hitching more secure.

Then he turned back to the girl whom he had rescued at the very brink of destruction.

She was trembling, white-faced. There were tears in her eyes as she came slowly, shyly forward.

"Mr. Preston——" she began.

"I hardly know that name nowadays," replied the boy, grimly. "Nowadays I'm always Tom to my friends."

"Tom, then," she corrected herself, "I know I have been using you very shabbily. I hope you will forgive me, and let me thank you with all my heart for having saved my father."

"Your father wasn't in any great danger, Miss Elsie."

"I'm Elsie—to my friends," she corrected in turn, with a swift rush of color.

"Your father wasn't in any danger, Elsie. But it made me almost ill to see the buggy going over the cliff."

"That was noble of you!" flashed the girl, earnestly. "My father has just told me of your splendid, almost superhuman battle against that fearful, slipping weight. You threw your life in the scale as coolly as if—as if I had always been kinder to you."

"I'd do that much for anybody," returned Tom, bluntly.

"I believe you," Elsie answered, simply. "But that doesn't lessen my admiration for you, or my gratitude. Won't you shake hands with me?"

Admiration? From this girl! Shake hands with her?

Tom Preston acted so suddenly and energetically that he felt sure, an instant later, he had made a fool of himself again.

Unconscious of his great strength, he gripped her soft little hand so forcefully that Elsie winced under the inflection, though she smiled bravely back at him.

Then he let up on that vimful grip, standing back shamefully.

"I hope we shall always be friends," he said, blushing.

"And I am very sure we shall be," Elsie glowed.

Her color was receding slightly. She stood looking frankly and admiringly at him.

Tom was sure that never before had he seen anything like as pretty a picture as this girl presented.

Then suddenly his consideration for others came back to him.

"Your father?" he broke in. "We must see what we can do for him."

Taking her hand, as he went back over the road, he led her straight to where Mr. Bright sat on the ground, his back against a young tree trunk.

"It's nothing but a sprain at the right ankle," nodded the old man, smilingly.

And Tom, after a careful examination, during which he removed the old man's right boot, satisfied himself that this was so.

"Better let the horse remain tied a little while, sir, and he'll quiet down better," suggested the boy.

"If it weren't for this ankle, Elsie and I would walk on into Blissville," murmured the old man. "I hate to trust my child's life to that brute again."

"Why couldn't Tom get in and drive us back—if he doesn't mind?" hinted the girl, appealing to her father, but looking at our hero.

"Why, of course I can!" cried the boy, eagerly.

"Shall we go now?" asked Elsie.

Tom could not help noting that this strange but at last very sweet girl looked to him rather than to her father.

"If your father is not in too great pain, it might be better to wait until the horse is quieter."

Though Tom answered the girl, he looked at Mr. Bright.

"Surely the worst horse couldn't get away from you!" cried the girl.

"Not unless the brute broke the lines," smiled Tom, coolly.

"I hadn't thought that the reins might not be as strong as the driver," Elsie Bright smiled back. "You are right to wait until the horse is less restive."

"Don't you think so, sir?" our hero asked, appealing to the old man.

"Decidedly," replied John Bright.

"Where is that young rascal? Oh, here he is!" cried a raging voice.

Around the bend, limping slightly, yet stamping with rage, came Richard Jarrett.

His face was so red as to suggest that a stroke of apoplexy was close at hand.

"Oh, you young thief!" roared Jarrett, shaking his huge fist at the boy.

"Be careful how you kick compliments my way!" warned the boy drily.

He spoke quietly, but there was a warning flash in his eyes that made the man, with the memory of a recent trouncing fresh in his mind, draw back in some alarm.

"Now, tell us what the trouble is, in an honest, manly way," went on Tom, coolly.

"You scared my horse and he ran away," roared Jarrett.

"I didn't, but go on!"

"That wild beast upset my buggy——"

"I'm glad you blame that to your horse, instead of to me."

"And threw us both out and nearly broke our necks!" raged Jarrett.

"Only came close to doing it, eh?" Tom asked, in evident disappointment.

"It stunned me for a while," Jarrett continued, stormily.

"Good things seldom last," remarked Tom, provokingly.

"And Carbury was badly stunned. He's still in a bad way."

"Why, I rather reckon Carbury has been in the bad way almost ever since he was able to talk," grimaced our hero.

John Bright, despite his pain, could not resist the temptation to chuckle aloud.

Jarrett wheeled briefly, shooting a look of anger at the old man.

Tom's fists doubled, but he waited for more open disrespect to Elsie's father before jumping in.

"While we were stunned," went on Jarrett, "some thief got in and stole a box containing valuable papers."

Tom Preston's heart seemed to stop beating for a brief instant.

Then it gave a great, tremendous bound of joy.

Papers? Then they must be the ones for which he had schemed and dared!

If the papers were gone—carried away—who could have done it unless it was good old Ned Bostwick, who had been lurking on that part of the road just above!

Perhaps the joy that filled the boy's heart so suddenly beamed for an instant in his eyes, for Jarrett, watching

him, leaped forward a couple of steps, shaking an accusing finger at our hero.

"So you admit taking them, do you, you young thief?" That was the end of Sandow, Junior's, patience.

He flew forward swiftly, ducking in easily under the big man's guard.

Biff! It was a stretcher, though not a knocker-out!

That spirited blow landed plumply on the big man's jugular, sending him to the earth.

"You unutterably miserable thing!" vented Sandow, Junior, standing over him, with eyes flashing. "You scoundrel! You cur! If you never yet learned to treat a human being with as much decency as you would a fairly decent dog, then your time has come to learn! Get up!"

But Jarrett, who imagined that there was more of the same in store for him if he got up, remained cravenly on his side.

"Get up!" rang Tom's low, warning, earnest, thrilling voice. "If you don't, you'll be mighty sorry that you didn't! For the last time, get up!"

"Don't hit me," mumbled the big man as he started to obey.

"I won't, if you behave yourself half way like an honest, decent man," quivered the boy. "Now, then, what did you mean by calling me a thief?"

"Didn't you take that box of papers?" mumbled Jarrett, looking at young Sandow with still affrighted eyes.

"I didn't. How could I? Your horse ran away from this point when I was trying to pull this other animal back from the edge of the cliff. Not once, since that instant, have I been away from this spot."

"That I can vouch for," broke in Elsie, warmly.

"And I, too," cried John Bright.

"Perhaps you really thought I did steal that box," went Tom Preston, more mildly.

"I did," grumbled Jarrett, "and I still think you know something about it."

Taunted, goaded, doubted, Richard Jarrett flared up again.

"Because the papers in that box concerned you more——"

Here the big fellow stopped short.

"Did you mean to say," smiled our hero, coolly, "that those papers belonged to me more than to anyone else?"

Jarrett's eyes flamed. He tried to speak, but gulped hard instead.

"After all, it matters very little what you do say, I suppose," smiled Tom. "I have a friend here who has been threatened. I must get him home. Why don't you go back to your friend, who, according to your statement, must have treated you very badly. Go back to your legal gentleman."

Wheel! Tom turned his back on his accuser, marching over to the horse, which he unhitched.

Jarrett was opening and shutting his hands in dumb, bowed rage while our hero carefully backed the buggy down close to where Mr. Bright sat.

"Do you mind holding the horse, Elsie, while I lift your father in?" he asked, looking at the girl.

Nodding brightly, she stepped up to the animal's head, taking hold of the bridle.

Then, as tenderly as if he were lifting a baby, Tom raised the old man, setting him as comfortably as possible on the seat.

"You'd better get in next, so you can take the reins," hinted Elsie.

So Tom leaped up into the box of the buggy, carefully gathered the reins in one hand, and held out the other.

"Come," he called, gently.

Taking her uplifted arm, he whirled her like a feather up into the buggy.

Then, seated between Elsie and her father, with never a look at the angry but mute, much-afraid Jarrett, young Sandow drove slowly down the road.

Not until they were sure that they were out of hearing of the big man of Blissville did any of them speak.

Then Tom could not help asking:

"Mr. Bright, do you mind my asking whether you were trapped into signing any papers for Jarrett within the last two days or so?"

"Thanks to you, Tom Preston, I did not," cried the old man.

"You went to Acton to see a lawyer?"

"Yes, and he must have been an honest man."

"Why?"

"Because he told me plainly to have nothing more to do with Jarrett than I couldn't help."

"You have gone part way into an arrangement with Jarrett over your invention, haven't you?" asked our hero, directly.

"Too far, I fear," sighed John Bright. "Too far, at least, judging by what my lawyer tells me."

"Did he advise you as to any way to get out of Jarrett's clutches?"

"The only way, I fear, lad, is an impossible one."

"What was that, sir, if I may ask?"

"Why, I am to offer to return to Jarrett what he has advanced me, with interest added, for the return of the papers already signed. A hopeless task, I fear."

"Maybe not, sir," spoke Tom, lightly.

He was wondering, hopefully, if Ned Bostwick had really found that box and made away with it.

And, if so, what did that box contain?

"You have some plan of your own, Tom?" asked Elsie, scanning his face keenly.

"Nothing, as yet, Elsie, except a hope," he answered her.

CHAPTER XI.

ALL UP IN SMOKE!

Driving easily along, Tom purposely went by the Bostwick place.

There, as he had hoped, was Ned.

Bostwick's face was plainly jubilant as he called out:

"Can I have a word with you, Tom?"

"The horse is quiet enough now for you to hold him," murmured our hero to the girl. "Will you excuse me for a moment?"

Waiting for her nod, he then jumped lightly to the ground, bounded over the wall, and gripped Ned's hand.

"I got the box that was in Jarrett's buggy," Ned whispered.

"Bully for you! But I almost knew you had it."

"It's a regular steel-bound box," Ned went on in his cautious whisper. "But I believe you could open it. Want to try now?"

"Will you excuse me for just a minute more?" Tom called back.

Receiving assent from both father and daughter, Tom followed Ned around into the barn.

Rummaging under the hay, Ned brought out the box in triumph.

Tug! Pull! Wrench! It was five minutes ere even Sandow, Junior, could snap that lock.

But at last it came open.

There were but a few folded documents inside. Tom Preston pounced upon them eagerly.

"Bright, Thorvald, Thorvald, Thorvald, Bright——" he read, running eagerly over the backings on the documents.

"Better be sure they're not dummies," whispered Ned, sauntering toward the door in order that he might be on the watch.

So Tom unfolded the papers, glancing them all over.

"No, they're all right," he called, in a whisper to his chum. "They are the original papers. All the Thorvald ones are here, and, with that one of Mr. Bright's that I got yesterday, they're all here now that belong to him. I've put them back in the box, Ned. Watch them with both eyes while I speak to Mr. Bright."

Hastening out to the old man, our hero murmured:

"Mr. Bright, I've got all the papers now that you ever passed to Jarrett. You can keep the papers and hand him back his money, if you do it cleverly enough."

"All the papers?" questioned the old man, delightedly.

Then he fell to counting on his fingers.

"Five of them?" he asked.

"Five, Mr. Bright."

"Thank heaven!" muttered the old man, fervently.

"Do you want them now, Mr. Bright, or shall we look after them, along with the papers that belong to my mother?"

"Better leave 'em here, lad, if they're safe. They wouldn't be safe in town. Jarrett would be equal to hiring thugs to loot my house. We couldn't lock them up at the Blissville Bank, for Jarrett is president of the bank."

"Then I'll have Ned stay here and watch the papers," agreed Tom.

"That will be far better, Tom, until we can decide what to do with the papers for their safe-keeping."

So Tom hurried back to tell Ned the result of the conference, then hastened once more to the buggy, for he realized that John Bright was in more and more pain with his ankle.

Briskly through the town they drove, and up to the door of the pretty little Bright cottage.

Tom helped them both out, carrying Elsie's father in his arms into the house and up to a sofa in the old man's bedroom.

"And now I suppose I had better return the horse to the livery stable?" suggested Tom.

"You needn't. I can telephone for the stable people to come here for their rig," proposed Elsie, and ran out of the room.

This was such an evident invitation to stay a little while that Tom, who didn't want to decline anyway, didn't even see a possible way to refuse.

When Elsie came back the young people bathed and dressed the injured ankle.

Then all three sat down to a council of war as to what was to be done to repay Jarrett in his own coin.

"Here I am, crippled in the house, when I ought to be bustling around to raise the money to hand back to Jarrett," moaned the old man.

"You don't need to hustle a bit," replied Tom, decisively. "From what I know of your invention, sir, you have only to write, as I mean to do, to the manufacturers in your line. They'll gladly enough send representatives here to see you, and they'll advance you much more money on the first payment than you'll need for Jarrett. For that matter, sir, it is only common honesty that makes us want to pay anything over to Jarrett. Legally, we wouldn't have to bother about such a thing. And it strikes me, Mr. Bright, that the less hustling you do, the more eager the people you want to trade with will be to get hold of your patent."

"Of course," agreed Elsie, as if she understood all about such business matters.

"You've mentioned the name Thorvald," broke in Elsie, suddenly.

"My mother's name, by her second marriage," Tom explained. "The Thorvald patent is now hers, through my stepfather's death."

"Where does your mother live?"

"I wish I knew," Tom exclaimed, moodily. "But I'll find out by advertising as soon as I have some money."

"I asked," went on Elsie, "because I knew a Mrs. Thorvald a while ago before we came here."

"Describe her," begged Sandow, Junior, tingling over.

But ere Elsie had spoken half a dozen sentences a boy broke in:

"Why, that's my mother, as sure as I'm alive. Elsie, where was she when you knew her?"

"Housekeeper in the boarding-house in Boston where we lived."

"Can you remember the address?"

"Easily," and Elsie gave it.

"It's me for the telegraph station," glowed the boy, who had been walking back and forth.

"And after sending that I'd better take a trip out to see how Ned is getting along with his very important trust. Then back to the telegraph office to wait for my answer, if it hasn't come."

"Why not have the answer sent here?" proposed Elsie, so hospitably that the boy, with a happy smile, assented.

Then he started down for the street door, and Elsie ran nimbly down with him.

"Good-by for a little while," she smiled, holding out her hand to him. "But you'll be back as soon as you can, won't you?"

"You can wager that I will," laughed happy Tom. "But that's an invitation that I never expected to receive from you."

"Perhaps not," she said, half shyly. "But shall I tell you something?"

"I shan't let you close that door, Elsie, until you have told me."

"Well, then, I think that perhaps the reason—yes, I'm sure it's the reason—why I didn't treat you better at first was that I was afraid I'd like you too well. And I didn't want to have a friend about whom I didn't know a blessed thing."

Then Tom Preston fairly ran to the telegraph station.

His message sent, and it gave only his address and the request to "come at once, important," Tom turned his face for the walk through the town and out into the suburbs.

"Gracious! I don't know that I've done right in leaving Ned alone as long as I have," Tom muttered, uneasily, as he wheeled into the road that led down by the Bostwick place. "There's no telling what wicked people might do to him to get those papers! And—gracious!"

For now Sandow, Junior, rounding a bend in the road and passing a small grove of trees, saw two sights that fairly made his heart sick.

The first was Ned Bostwick himself, on the road an eighth of a mile above his house and running toward it at full speed.

But the nearer sight that made our hero sick with dread was—

The Bostwick barn, a mass of flames, burning furiously—a red-hot fire-trap into which no human being could venture.

"Oh, Ned, Ned!" groaned the boy, in his heart. "So far away, and everything lost—the Bright as well as the Thorvald papers!"

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

In that first moment of frenzied despair Sandow, Junior, did move from the spot on which he had halted.

What was the use?

"Get a move on you, can't you?" roared Ned, from the distance, as he dashed into his own yard. "Help me save the house!"

"The house?" repeated Tom to himself. "That's safe enough, with the wind blowing away from it. It can't catch."

But just to please Ned he broke into a trot.

"This looks like some scoundrel's work," panted Ned. "The barn wasn't much, but it was a building, anyway, and a part of our property."

"Barn be blowed!" retorted young Sandow, disgustedly. "But, Ned, those papers are gone up!"

"Now, what are you talking about?" uttered Ned, eyeing his chum. "The papers? You didn't think they were in the barn, did you?"

"Oh, Ned! Where are they?"

"In the bottoms of my shoes, and crowding my feet out of place," whispered Bostwick in his chum's ear.

"What makes me mad," grunted Ned, "is the trick that got me away from here!"

"What was that trick?"

"Why, little Tommy Adamson came running into the yard and said my mother was sick up the road. I knew she had gone to visit Mrs. Jantry, and I ran all the way up there and found my mother eating pie and drinking tea. When I get hold of that Tommy I'll feel like wringing his neck."

"Don't do it," advised our hero, easily. "Tommy isn't to blame—there isn't a chance of that. Some fellow hired him to run down here and Tommy, I'll bet, thought he was taking the straight goods in the way of a message."

"Yes, I guess that's so," nodded Ned. "But, at least, we can make Master Tommy tell who gave him the message to carry."

"Those shoes are rather big," commented Tom, looking down critically at his friend's footgear.

"They used to be my father's," explained Ned. "But I had to put them on to find enough room for all the papers."

"Well, as you're such a mighty valuable young man at present," spoke up Sandow, Junior, "I reckon we'd better walk out to where your mother is and tell her about the barn. Then we'll walk into town and stay there until those papers are safe somewhere."

"Here comes a friend of ours," spoke up Ned, as the sound of machinery came to their ears.

Bradley was on the front seat of a new touring car, which he was driving with evident pride.

Toot! toot! Then he brought the machine to a neat stop.

"Jump in, boys, and be my first passengers," he invited, beamingly. "I'll take you for a run."

But when he heard where they wanted to go, Dr. Bradley took them, instead, to Ned's mother.

She, in turn, was treated to a ride homeward.

Our hero was on the front seat with Bradley as they started away.

"I've got a few things to tell you," announced our hero, eagerly.

Then out came the whole story of their doings.

"Good!" thrilled the young doctor. "And, oh, I believe this will prove the turning-point in Jarrett's career in this town. I may as well tell you that I've started a quiet movement among the voters of this town. At present all the town officials, even down to the two-dollar-a-day constables, are Jarrett's creatures, put in office by him. But I've got enough of the voters organized so that, in a few weeks from now, all the Jarrett crowd will go out of office."

"What do you advise about putting the papers in a safe place, Doc?"

"Why, why not use this car now to go over to Dalton and lock the papers up in the bank where I deposit? It's only nine miles from here—twenty minutes or so with this car."

It was less than twenty minutes later when the Bradley machine drew up before the Dalton National Bank.

In less than five minutes after that Tom Preston had the Bright and the Thorvald papers where nobody could get at them without permission.

"And where now?" smiled Dr. Bradley, as they climbed into the car. "For I'm your driver on this exciting day of your life."

"I don't want to go anywhere now but to Mr. Bright's," answered young Sandow, turning a bright, smiling face to his first friend in Blissville. "I want to be there when the first word comes from my mother."

A short while later the auto drew up before the Bright house.

In a twinkling the door opened, with Elsie speeding down the path holding up a yellow envelope.

His fingers trembling, Tom tore open the envelope.

"My dear boy, thank heaven! With you to-night.

"Catherine Thorvald."

"It's mother then, all right, and no mistake!" throbbed the happy young Sandow.

"And here I guess we'll leave you," smiled Dr. Bradley.

Then toot! toot! and they were away, leaving Tom with Elsie.

"How's your father's ankle?" Tom asked quickly.

"He's able to get around the room. It'll be all right in a day or two. I have gotten your mother's room ready. Now we must see what time the evening train gets in."

"This is beginning to seem like Blissville," murmured the happy boy.

"And your room is next to your mother's."

"My room? Why, this is Blissville!"

He looked at her smilingly, so happy that he hardly knew what to do. But they had passed inside the doorway, so he drew her quickly toward him, kissing her twice before he felt frightened and drew himself back.

But Elsie, though she colored deeply, did not rebuke

him, so Tom reasoned that he must have been forgiven promptly.

It was after 9:30 that evening when the train bearing Mrs. Thorvald arrived at Blissville.

After the first hearty kiss and embrace, Tom led her to a waiting hack and started on the way for the Bright home.

But while still two blocks from their destination Tom suddenly checked his quick, excited talk to listen to an angry chorus up the street.

Then the hack passed a crowd of nearly a hundred masked men.

In their centre marched Jarrett, white-faced and faltering, held up on either side, his hands tied behind him.

What happened that night was that the men of Blissville, their long-pent-up feelings overflowing, took their late bully out of the town to a vacant lot, where they tarred and feathered him in the most approved shape.

It was the end of Jarrett's rule in Blissville. At the following election all of his creatures were turned out of office.

Lawyer Carbury fled the morning after the tarring and feathering.

Jarrett, wholly tamed, quickly consented to drop the burglary charge against our hero. He also accepted the refunds on the Bright and Thorvald patents.

John Bright and Mrs. Thorvald easily realized hand some royalties on the inventions that they respectively owned.

Tom and Elsie got along so well that ere long they decided to get along together all the time.

Ned Bostwick was put thoroughly on his feet by the parents of the young couple. Tom and Ned are greater chums than ever.

Dr. Bradley now has more practice than he wants.

"But my proudest position," he sometimes tells our hero, smilingly, "is that of physician-in-ordinary to the family of Mr. and Mrs. Sandow, Junior."

THE END.

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